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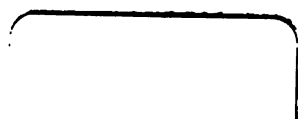
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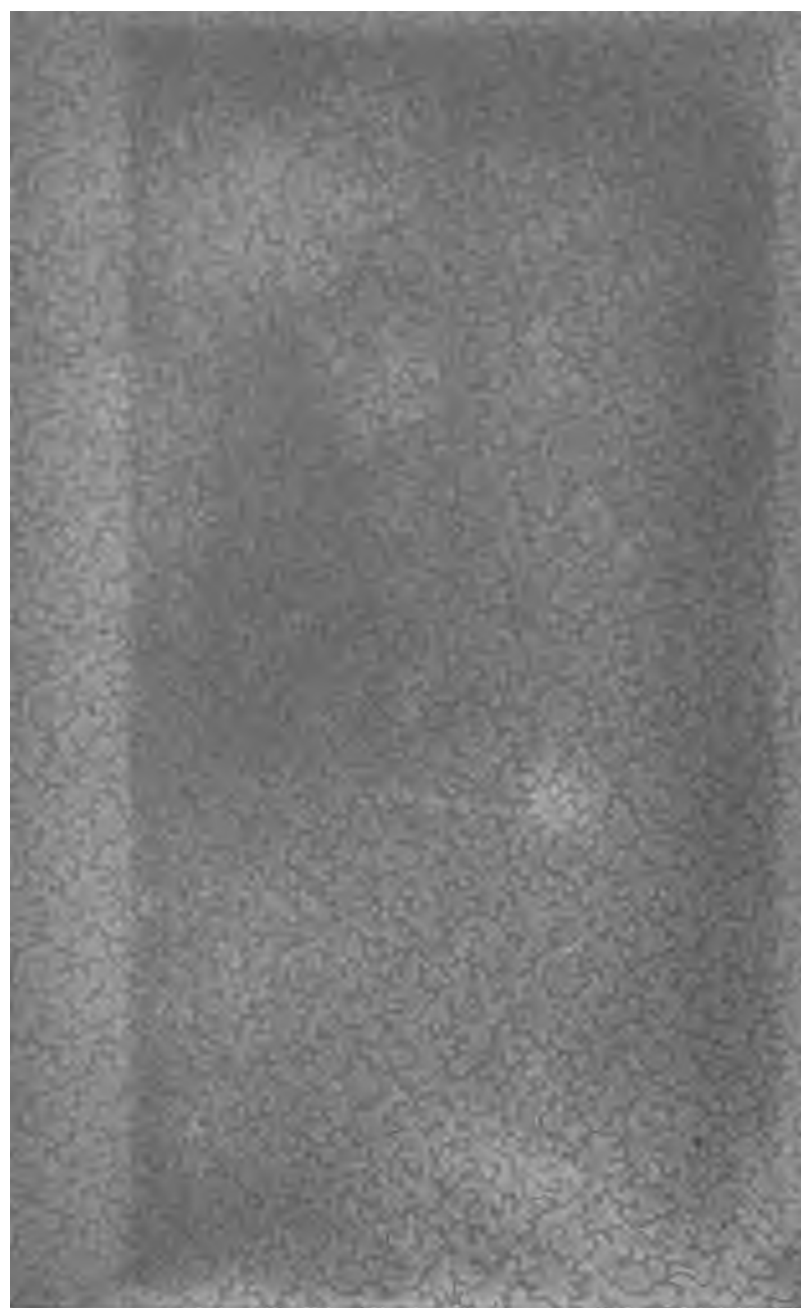
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ELIANE







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ELIANE

VOL. I.



ELIANE

A Novel

BY

MRS. AUGUSTUS CRAVEN

AUTHOR OF "A SISTER'S STORY."

TRANSLATED BY

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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ELIANE.

CHAPTER I.

It used to be the custom in France to spend the whole of the summer in the country and the winter in town. By All Saints' day, or, at the latest, at the end of December, the chateaux were deserted, and the hotels of the Faubourg St. Germain filled with fashionable inhabitants. This is no longer the case. People remain in their country houses until nearly the end of winter, and though the Paris season encroaches a little on the spring, it is over by the beginning of June, and the time devoted to social enjoyment thus considerably abridged.

Whether this change is for the best is a question not easily solved. Some people would say that the French landowners are more alive to their duties than was their wont in former days, that they reside in the country not merely to rest from the fatigues and dissipation of Paris, or to seek fresh sources of amusement, but that, returning to the traditions of their ancestors, they devote themselves to occupations and duties fatally neglected by the ill-fated generation which perished amidst the ruins of the social edifice it had helped to overthrow.

Others maintain that this change in the habits of the higher classes in France, results from the excessive and ever-increasing luxury of modern Parisian life. But whatever may be its cause, there is no doubt that it has effected a regular transformation in French society. The salons which used to be its chief attraction have, in process of time, been gradually closed; nothing of the same kind now exists, and mental gifts have ceased to command influence. There is not a single house where the dispersed fragments of many a brilliant *coterie* can meet to perpetuate

traditions more important than even the refined language and social charm for which Paris was once so famous.

This is, no doubt, a pity. It is sad to belong to an age of cold, hard, and often coarse, realities ; and worse still to live in an atmosphere of unrelenting hatred. In the sixteenth century people fought in the streets, but social meetings were neutral ground. During a truce it often happened that the conflicting parties met at *fêtes*, where, at any rate for a moment, they forgot their animosities. But when salons become the arena where desperate encounters take place, when the hearts and the self-love of people are perpetually wounded and hurt, the traces of those wounds, bloodless as they are, leave deeper scars behind, and heal with greater difficulty. This is one of the dark features of the present time, and there are others equally bad. But in spite of these admissions, it is still possible to take a hopeful view of the future, and not to side with those who look on the century in which our lot is cast as a melancholy exception to the general rule of human affairs.

With regard to the point in question, if

Parisian life has lost much, not merely of its charm, but of its dignity, we must acknowledge that, as regards France in general, real compensations are to be found. For in the time-honoured chateaux which have survived the tempest that levelled so many others to the ground, and in the numerous abodes acquired or erected by that class of professional and commercial men who are gradually rising to the highest ranks of French society, a taste for country life now exists, and its purposes and advantages are better understood than they ever were before.

Many beneficial and useful results have ensued from this change, and to quote, if not its most important, still one of its great benefits, there is a considerable increase in the number of women who are never bored themselves in the country, and have the art of preserving others from the curse of ennui.

There was, however, one noble lady of our period not at all inclined to adopt the habits of a new generation. The Marquise de Liminge had been accustomed from her youth upward to establish herself in her hotel of the Rue de Varennes by the first of November,

and to return to her country house, Erlon les Bois, on the first of May ; and with the sole exception of a journey to England, which she had made the year before our story begins, she had always adhered to this rule.

But now all was changed. Her daughter was eighteen years of age, and it became a duty to take her into society, and not to leave Paris as long as the few hundred persons which compose what emphatically goes by that name were still in town, and balls and parties afforded opportunities of exhibiting to the world one of the prettiest of the young ladies who every year make their *début* during the short-lived period of the Parisian season.

It was at the beginning of June, and the day one of those when, as the saying is, all Paris is out of doors ; and indeed the crowds that throng the promenades, and sit in the Champs Elysees, and the public gardens, would lead one to suppose that nobody did remain at home ; those who form an exception to the rule are likely enough to feel a sort of restless discomfort. The distant roll of carriages, the breeze which comes in through the window

laden with the perfume of lilacs and lilies of the valley, are apt to disturb their solitude, and draw away their minds from serious business.

Madame de Liminge and her daughter were—like the rest of the world—enjoying the beauty of the day in the alleys of the Bois de Boulogne, crowded that afternoon with the smartest carriages in Paris, and swarming with foot passengers. The stately hotel of the Rue de Varenne was not, however, wholly deserted. Eliane de Liminge, the Marquise's niece, was sitting alone at home in a large and prettily-furnished room, quite absorbed, if not by the book she was by way of reading, at any rate by her own thoughts. She was plunged in what the French call a *rêverie*—what we should term a fit of deep musing, or a brown study.

When women dream in this way it is, generally speaking, about themselves, and in a listless and melancholy manner. But it was not so in the present instance. Eliane was not thinking of herself, she was not soaring into imaginary worlds and indulging in vague fancies. A distinct remembrance—a very

dear one to her heart, and particularly present to her memory that day—clouded her brow and depressed her spirits. The joyful sights and sounds of spring were powerless to dispel her sadness.

She was nineteen. She had only known one great sorrow, nor had it been of the number of those which in the ordinary course of things blight a girl's opening life. Still her heart was sore, and she felt as if the future could have nothing in store for her to be compared with the happiness she had enjoyed and lost.

A sound of steps in the adjoining ante-room suddenly roused her. The door of the one in which she was sitting was hastily thrown open, and a tall, good-looking young man came in. He started back when he saw Eliane. It was evident that he had not in the least expected to find any one in that room, which was a sort of morning apartment or study, generally appropriated by the young ladies of the house.

"Excuse me," he said; "I am afraid I am disturbing you. But who would ever have fancied that at this hour, and on this

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"Excuse me," he said; "I am afraid I am disturbing you. But who would ever have fancied that at this hour, and on this

beautiful day, you would not be in the Bois with my mother and my sister ! ”

“ You have not disturbed me at all ; but are you looking for anything that I can help you to find ? ”

“ I wanted a book which I made sure was in this room—that book,” he added, pointing to the one Eliane had laid down as he came in.

“ Tennyson’s poems ? ”

“ Yes ; I wanted to read again those lines you showed me yesterday ; and as I thought you were out, I meant to establish myself in this study of yours, as it is called. There is no other room in the house to which the word comfortable can be applied ; and it is only since you have been here that it deserves to be so called.”

“ My aunt and Blanche would not be flattered at the compliment you pay me.”

“ They would not consider it at all a compliment ; their taste is not the least like mine, nor probably like yours. I dare say they think that you have made this domain of yours only very untidy. That large table, for instance, crowded with books, and in the

middle of them two huge vases full of flowers. Then that other little table in an independent position near the arm-chair; the shelves too, and the old sofa separated from the wall against which it had stood for half a century at least; and then that beautiful rose in its little white jar innocently exhibiting itself on that green table-cover, as if it had not been placed there on purpose. The piano under the old Indian clock, and on the opposite panel that ivory crucifix. All this is charming, you know, for me, who understand the sort of thing, and what is picturesque and artistic. But the grand salon, with its tapestry hangings, its round table in the centre of the room, its fauteuils and chairs systematically arranged; and even the little salon, with its horrible furniture in the style of the first empire, are much more in accordance with the taste of my family. I am sure they think them much more *convenable* than this enchanting mixture of order and disorder, which for my part I delight in. I like this room better than any other in the house, even when you are not sitting in it."

Eliane had began by laughing at her

cousin's outburst, but by the time he had left off speaking, her face, which had lightened up for a moment, resumed its previous expression of sadness.

"If what you say is true, Raynald, I am sorry for it," she said. "When people differ from others as to tastes they often unconsciously annoy them; and God knows how grieved I should be to vex in the smallest thing your dear mother or Blanche, whom I am so fond of, though—"

"Though you are not in the least like her."

"It is anything but praise of me to say so. But be that as it may, I now belong to your family. A year ago your mother adopted me, and I ought by this time to have conformed to all her tastes and habits, and given up my own. But to do so I must begin by a little forgetting the past, and happy as I am—"

She stopped, afraid of betraying emotion which might have implied a want of gratitude.

Raynald de Liminge, surprised and interested, looked at her inquiringly. She hesitated a little, and then said,

"This day is a trying one to me."

Raynald misunderstood her.

"It is much too beautiful a day to be alone and shut up. I am not surprised that you should feel depressed. Why on earth did not you go out with my mother and Blanche?"

"My aunt wanted me to drive with them, and Blanche asked to remain at home with me; but this day reminds me of a great sorrow, and I wished to spend it alone."

As Eliane said this she was standing with one of her hands resting on the back of an arm-chair, and for some minutes afterwards she seemed lost in the recollection of bygone days. Her attitude, unconscious as she was of it, displayed to great advantage her graceful, slim, and tall figure. In her simple grey silk gown and black sash, her beautiful wavy hair divided on her forehead like that of a Greek statue, and falling back in rich curls behind her head, she would have been a good model for a painter. The slanting rays of the setting sun were gilding with a golden hue this lovely living picture and its surroundings.

Raynald, as he had himself said, was keenly alive to all that is beautiful and picturesque in

nature and in art. He had never before been so much struck with his cousin's beauty, and for the first time his interest and curiosity with regard to her were strongly excited. Why was she so sad? She was not apparently of a melancholy disposition. What thought was it which clouded at that moment the brightness of her dark eyes? What were the recollections which made that lovely girl sigh so deeply? He did not know how to word a question which would lead her to speak of the cause of her sorrow.

At the time that Eliane had been adopted by his mother he was travelling in the East, and he had returned to Paris only a few days before. His ideas as to what had led to that adoption were vague. All he knew was that her father was his father's brother, and that she had been brought up in England. * On the strength of English novels, of which he was a great reader, he felt inclined to attribute her dejection to some romantic cause. His somewhat sentimental disposition and refined taste had given him a decided predilection for that kind of literature, the counterpart of which can hardly be said to exist in French.

His friends often chaffed him on that subject. But he was not, on account of it, the least more inclined than the most prosaic young man of his acquaintance to fall in love with any of the young ladies he met in Paris. He used to say that they were all alike, and that for the life of him he could not distinguish Mademoiselle de A. from Mademoiselle de B. This apparent similitude which no doubt characterizes French girls on their first entrance into society, and, generally speaking, until they are married, then disappears quickly enough; and Raynald would have been perhaps more apt than many other men to detect differences of mind and character underlying this apparent uniformity if he had ever given a thought to the subject. But his interest had never been sufficiently roused for that purpose.

It so happened that when his attention was turned to his cousin, it did strike him that she was unlike any girl he had ever seen. What that difference consisted in he would have found, perhaps, difficult to say. She was calm, simple in manner; more silent, perhaps, than others. She had adopted without any apparent effort the habits of her

new home. Not any more than Blanche, who was two years younger, would she have spoken in society, unless any one spoke to her. When there was company she sat with her cousin in a corner of the room, and sometimes never uttered a word during the whole evening. This was no effort to her. It was not an act of obedience, or done in order to imitate others. There was a natural reserve in her character which she found it difficult to overcome; but when she did speak it was easy to see that her ideas were spontaneous and original, and that she was used to think, to read, and to converse with habitual freedom.

At last Raynald made up his mind to speak of what was occupying his thoughts.

"I hope," he said, in rather a solemn manner, "that you will excuse what I am going to say if it is an indiscretion, but, considering our near relationship, may I venture to speak to you as if you were my sister?"

Eliane, roused from her abstraction, seated herself in the arm-chair against which she had been leaning, and turned towards him.

"I know," he said, "that the lives of English girls are in many respects very unlike those of French girls; they do not run in the same uniform groove. If you would not find it too painful to tell me why this day has such sad reminiscences for you; if it is not too great a secret, will you confide it to me?"

Eliane opened wide her beautiful eyes, and said :

"I have no secret—nothing to confide."

"But, then, why are you so very sorrowful? Why do you wish to spend this day alone? Your eyes were full of tears just now."

Eliane answered with emotion :

"This day is the anniversary of my grandfather's death. He died suddenly whilst I was sitting with him just as I am now sitting with you."

Raynald was half-disappointed, half-relieved, by this simple explanation. But who was this grandfather? It could not be the old Marquis de Liminge, whom he remembered very well, though he had died seventeen years ago when he was himself a boy of ten. It must be her mother's father she alluded to. He could

hardly conceive so deep a grief in a young girl for the loss of an aged relative ; the romance he had conjured up vanished, but his curiosity was not satisfied. There had always been a mystery in the family about his uncle, Eliane's father. All he knew about him was, that after committing every sort of folly he had left France, entirely ruined, and left his elder brother burdened with his debts. He had never returned, and his name was seldom mentioned by his relatives. Raynald remembered having heard that he had married an English-woman, and taken her to America, and that after his death his widow, in a hopeless state of health, had sought the shelter of her father's roof, and with her last breath bequeathed to him the care of her only child. Raynald had never bestowed a thought on this little girl or her unknown grandfather ; but when on his arrival in Paris he found Eliane domesticated in his mother's house, he ceased to be so entirely indifferent on the subject, and now he wanted to find out everything that concerned her. But he could hardly cross-question her on the subject without betraying an ignorance somewhat extraordinary in so near a relation.

Whilst he was hesitating she said, as if in answer to the question he was longing to ask :

“ My grandfather’s name was John Maxwell. Perhaps you have never heard of him.”

Raynald coloured a little, and was obliged to own that such was the case.

“ It does not surprise me,” she said. “ We were such complete strangers to my father’s family. And yet,” she added, “ it is a great name, an ancient and a respected name.”

Raynald was unfortunately not well informed enough as to English names and families to know whether this was true. A few famous names in both countries are well known beyond the limits of their respective frontiers ; but generally speaking, there is but little acquaintance on either side of the Channel with minor historic details of this sort. In France people are accustomed to associate the idea of a noble family with high-sounding titles. They apply the same rule to England, and are not aware that there are many untitled gentlemen in that country residing in the ancestral homes of their forefathers, whose illustrious lineage dates from a period antecedent to the Norman

Conquest, and greatly exceeds in antiquity the pedigrees of most of the members of the House of Lords. The honours of the Peerage have not sought them out in their dignified obscurity, and this is particularly the case with the old Catholic families, whose fidelity to their faith so long debarred them from the privileges of their birth. It was to one of those noble and ancient families that Eliane's grandfather belonged.

"You were very much attached to him then?" Raynald said.

With an earnest look in her eyes Eliane answered :

"Yes ; he was the person I loved most in the world. It was not only because he was kind to me and fond of me, and that I was grateful to him, but it was much more, very much more than that. I have no recollection of my father, and my mother died when I was quite a little child. I have only a vague remembrance of her beautiful figure and her sweet, pale face. But as to my grandfather, I was always with him, always near him. He was everything to me. You cannot think how good, how pious, how clever he was. He

taught me everything I know ; I owe him more than I can ever express. From the time I was eight till I was eighteen I lived alone with him, my old governess, Madame Milsant, and Father Vincent, our chaplain. I was so happy all that time, Raynald, that I sometimes think that I shall never be so happy again—that the joyful time of my life is over.”

“ Oh, come ! ” Raynald exclaimed, “ that is indeed a strange idea—an absurd one, I should say. Never be happy again because your grandfather—a most excellent man, I have no doubt, but of course a very old one—is dead ! It is impossible ! Such a thing never did happen and never will happen. But how came it that until you had that great sorrow you did not know anything of your father’s family ? Mr. Maxwell must of course have been aware that you had relations in France, that you were not the only Liminge in existence. Why did he not make you acquainted with us ? ”

Eliane blushed, and replied with some emotion :

“ I do not think that *he* was guilty of negligence and indifference.”

There was a moment of silence. Raynald

saw that he was treading on delicate ground, and resolved to find out more on the subject before asking his cousin any other questions. He was afraid that he had wounded her feelings, and was sorry for what he had said. But her thoughts were at that moment turned in another direction.

“It was, as I told you, a year ago,” she said, “and about this hour, the weather as fine as it is to-day. We were sitting opposite to one another in the library at Redwood, talking together; his elbow was resting on the table, and his eyes fixed earnestly upon me. I was not sad then. He was very, very happy, my darling grandfather, and so was I. In his hand was a letter which he had been anxiously expecting. It was one from your mother, Raynald. For some time past he had often been speaking of my French relatives, which he had hardly ever done before. I do not know if this was from a presentiment that his end was approaching, and because his knowledge of those who were to succeed him in the possession of our old home made him overcome his reluctance to communicate with your family. Although he felt hurt at

their neglect, and had resolved not to be the first to begin any intercourse with them, still he did subdue his pride so far as to write to your mother. I am sure his letter must have been a beautiful and a touching one, for her answer to it was all he could have wished. It entirely did away with his resentment, and reassured him as to my future fate. All the sad things that had happened during my father's lifetime were forgotten, and at that moment I am speaking of he was telling me that he would soon take me to France. 'Before I die,' he said, 'I must be acquainted with those to whom I shall bequeath my treasure.' Dear grandfather! these were his last words. His dear eyes were looking at me so kindly. There was a smile on his lips. A sunbeam was shining on his white hair."

Eliane paused, and taking a gold medallion which was hanging on a black string round her neck, she said :

"Look at his picture ; it is exactly like him."

Raynald took the medallion, and was struck with the resemblance between the aged man's

features and those of his grandchild. In both there was a gentle firmness, something which indicated a strong character.

She took back the picture, gazed at it with a deep tenderness, and then said in a low voice :

“ Yes, it was just in that way he was looking at me, when all at once—Oh, my God ! can I ever forget it ?—I saw his face change, he turned deadly pale, stretched out his arms, and made an effort to rise, but instantly fell back heavily in his arm-chair. The servants heard my cries and rushed in. He opened his eyes for an instant and turned them towards the window, whence our little chapel was visible. I exclaimed, ‘ Run for Father Vincent.’ Grand-papa smiled, and I fell on my knees with my arms round him. He laid his hand on my head and said, ‘ Elly,’ and then with a sigh, ‘ My God—!’ He tried to raise his hand to his forehead ; I think he wanted to make the sign of the Cross ; then, after that, I saw and heard nothing more. When Father Vincent arrived he thought we were both dead.”

Eliane could no longer restrain her tears ; she hid her face in her hands and wept with-

out constraint. When at last she raised her head, Raynald was looking at her with so much emotion and sympathy that, surprised and touched, she said :

“Thank you, Raynald. I see that you feel for me. I did not mean to speak to any one of my grief to-day, and that was why I wished to be alone. But it has done me good ; it has relieved my heart to talk of it. Thank you so much.”

CHAPTER II.

RAYNALD would have gladly prolonged this conversation, and Eliane, encouraged by his sympathy, was telling him how, after eight days of loneliness and grief, and when the home of her childhood—from whence the lifeless remains of her grandfather had been carried to the grave—was about to be given up to the heirs of the estate, the Marquise de Liminge had arrived, and by her motherly kindness soothed her spirits and strengthened her in her sorrow. She was describing how the journey, the change of scene, the arrival in France, and Blanche's affectionate welcome had lightened her affliction, and that without forgetting the past she had gradually and peacefully settled down in her present happy home. But before she had reached this point in her narrative the noise of the carriage in the court interrupted its course.

Raynald looked at his watch, and with a sort of suspicion that his mother might not entirely approve of his establishing himself in the morning-room when his cousin was sitting alone, he opened the window which led into the garden, and quietly walked down the stone steps; whilst Eliane, to whom such an idea had never occurred, went to meet her aunt and cousin; but before she reached the door it was hastily thrown open, and Blanche, shutting it after her, rushed into the room. She was flushed and out of breath, but made a sign with her hand which was intended to convey to Eliane that she had something particularly interesting to tell her.

Blanche was rather apt to relate, with great animation, things that did not appear of as much importance to her cousin as they did to herself. This made Eliane await patiently and without any great curiosity for what she was about to be told. But this indifference did not last long, for she was very fond of Blanche, and it was with a look of great surprise and anxious interest that she heard her say:

“Eliane, I think I am going to be married.”

"You are going to be married, Blanche! Is it possible?"

"Yes, indeed," Blanche answered; and throwing her hat on the canopy, she stood before the glass passing her fingers through her beautiful fair curls, and adding to their disordered state. "Yes, indeed, I think so. Why do you look so surprised? What would make it impossible? I shall be eighteen on the twenty-eighth of this month."

"But you were saying this morning that you had not a thought you did not tell me—not a secret you would keep from me."

"I said what was quite true. I did not know it then."

Eliane looked still more astonished.

"What can have happened since three o'clock? Who did you meet during your drive?"

Blanche seated herself near her cousin, and said in a confidential tone:

"That is just what I am going to tell you. You want to know who we met? Well, we met the Baronne de Crécy, and there in the Bois, you know, she made a sign for her carriage and ours to stop, and then she asked

mamma to pay her a visit early this evening ; and she added with a nod which was full of meaning, 'And of course I reckon on your bringing Blanche with you.' Mamma said she would, and we drove on ; then she kissed me, and said, 'My love, you must wear your white dress this evening. It is of all your gowns the one that becomes you most.'"

"Well, and what of that?"

"Wait a minute. Mamma explained it all to me, and I am going to tell you. The fact is, that Madame de Crécy's nephew—the Comte de Monléon—will be there to-night."

"Well?"

"Well, he is one of the best *partis* in Paris. He is rich, high born. He has no parents ; so that he is now master of his fortune, and on that account all the mothers in Paris set their caps at him ; but till now he would not hear of marrying, and he has kept out of the way of all young ladies as if they had the plague, he was so afraid of committing himself. So I have never seen him. You understand now. . . ."

"No, indeed," Eliane said ; "I do not understand it at all."

"Well, I should have thought that being two years older than I am, and in some ways more like a married woman, that you would understand that when Madame de Cr  cy asked mamma to bring me with her this evening, she made it clear that it was in order to meet her nephew ; and that means that at last he thinks of marrying ; and if he likes my looks," —Blanche, as she said this, glanced at her own image in the glass,— "then it follows that I shall be the object of his choice."

"No," Eliane answered ; "I should never have guessed all that. And would you then accept him at once without any more to do ?"

"Certainly, if I like his appearance ; and I dare say I shall, for mamma says he is clever, and not at all an unpleasing person."

Eliane did not really know what to say. In the happy, peaceful, and solitary life she had led, if the subject of marriage had ever entered her thoughts, it was under so different an aspect from that which was now presented to her that she felt a sort of consternation and almost a wish to cry. Blanche perceived this, and said :

"What is the matter, Eliane ? You look

quite shocked. Do you happen to have heard anything about M. de Monléon that I do not know ?”

Eliane could not help smiling at this supposition.

“About M. de Monléon ? Oh dear, no ! Your knowledge of him and mine seem pretty well on a par. This is the first time I have heard his name.”

“Well, I did not think it likely you knew anything against him ; but you looked so grave that I began to think so. Tell me why you seemed so taken aback by what I told you. Does it vex you to think that I, who am the youngest of the two, may perhaps be married before you ?”

Eliane opened wide her eyes.

“Oh, that is a funny idea !” she said. “How could it ever cross your mind ? It shows you do not know me.”

“Well, all I can say is, that without any scruple and without being much mistaken, I should suspect most of my friends of a similar feeling.”

“Then they do not love you as much as I do. But I think this is all very sad. . . .”



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"Sad! do you really think so? I do not see why it should be sad to marry a man of high birth and very rich, whom all the girls I know would gladly accept, and who would prefer me to any one else."

"Oh, yes; I can understand that to be preferred must be pleasant; but then, if on your side you did not feel any preference for him?"

Blanche hesitated a little, and then answered:

"I think that when all important things are secured, it is enough if a girl does not dislike the man she marries."

"Important things?"

"Yes; his fortune, his position, and then his character."

"Aye, his character. But how can one tell what is a man's character if one does not know him?"

"There is no difficulty about that; girls are not expected to find it out themselves. They all marry in this way. It is only in novels that people meet and fall in love, and all that sort of thing; so I have been told, for I have never been allowed to read

novels. But, after all," Blanche added, with a merry laugh, "I dare say I am selling the skin of the hare before I have caught him. Now, please, do not look so grave and sad. I have told you all this, though it is a great secret; and perhaps mamma would not like my chattering to you about it, for she has not breathed a word on the subject to anybody, not even to Raynald, or M. de Malseigne, or even to Mademoiselle Silvestre."

This last-mentioned individual was Blanche's old governess, who still lived with them.

The Vicomte de Malseigne was so faithful an *habitué* of the house that he also seemed like one of the family. He was much older than Raynald, but, notwithstanding that difference of age, his greatest friend.

"No, not even to my brother, or those two old friends, has she spoken of it. I should not have found it difficult to hold my tongue with any one but you, Eliane. Ever since you have been here I have been so happy. I love you very much, and it is easy to me to open my heart to you—easier even than to my mother. You must be very good, Eliane, for me to have felt that from the first."

She threw her arms round her cousin's neck in such a childlike, caressing manner, and looked into her eyes with so much fondness, that Eliane pressed her to her heart with a tenderness which seemed to imply a desire to cherish and protect her — an unaccountable impulse, considering her age and their relative positions; and indeed she could not but feel, even had Blanche needed it, how little able she would have been to guide and advise her, Eliane's own ideas of happiness being so entirely different from hers. She saw this plainly enough after a moment's reflection, and also how proper and necessary it was not to express her own opinions on subjects on which she was obviously inexperienced. In spite, however, of her gentleness and natural deference for others, her ideas on certain points were singularly defined, considering the almost conventual solitude in which she had lived. The years of her childhood and early youth, however, had not been dull or profitless. As to her amusements, they had consisted chiefly in long rides on horseback, visits to the poor people at Redwood, and periodical school-feasts on the lawn of the house, which she

enjoyed as much as the village children. Her grandfather having persistently declined all invitations for her, as well as for himself, to the neighbouring country houses, his intercourse with those of his own rank had gradually dropped. She had therefore known nothing of society; but the constant companionship of a person as superior in intellect, as talented, as noble-minded, and as energetic in character as Mr. Maxwell, had told very beneficially on her own soul and habits of thought. She had learnt as well, and even better than other girls, all that a highly-educated woman should know. The manly element in her education had given her a strength of will and steadiness of purpose which is generally the result of a father's example and teachings. She had lacked a mother's care and guidance, an irreparable loss in most cases, but her natural gentleness and refinement had supplied their place; though strong in character, she was not wanting in any feminine grace and charm. The energy of her disposition was not at all apparent in the ordinary intercourse of life, for in small things she was singularly yielding and

almost indolent in her readiness to follow the lead of others.

The dinner hour at the Hotel de Liminge was at seven, and Blanche left her cousin to go and attend to her dress—a most important consideration on that particular evening, on which the fate of her life might, more or less, depend on her being becomingly attired.

Eliane was lingering a moment behind, when her aunt appeared at the garden window and called her.

“Eliane,” she said, “we are going to spend the evening at Madame de Crécy’s. You are of course asked, but are you inclined to go out to-night? Do just as you like, my dear child; you are quite at liberty to say yes or no.”

Eliane answered without hesitation :

“It is the whole of this day that I wished to spend at home. So if you please, dear aunt, I will not go out to-night.”

Unconsciously, perhaps, Madame de Liminge felt relieved. She kissed her niece, and said :

“Just as you like, my love. I am only afraid you will feel dull all the evening alone.”

“I assure you that to-day I really wish

to remain alone, and that I shall not be in the least bored. I will sit here till Blanche comes home."

Madame de Liminge would never have thought of keeping Eliane in the background on purpose, and would not, even to herself, have admitted that there was any danger of her throwing Blanche into the shade. But still she was not altogether sorry that Eliane had chosen to stay at home that evening, and was pleased that her niece had unconsciously done just what she wished.

It would have been impossible not to feel respect for Madame de Liminge. She had been left a widow when still very young, and had entirely devoted herself to her two children, managed their property and their education with equal success. She was one of those women oftener met with in France than in any other country, who would be capable of governing a kingdom. No man of business, however able, could have taught her anything as to the administration of an estate, or the judicious investment of money. She was at the same time high-minded, just, and kind, exceedingly charitable to the poor, though

keen-sighted and quick at detecting imposture or false pretences. Her establishments in Paris and in the country were generally considered as models of good management. She had excellent servants, for she knew well how to choose them, and though a very watchful mistress, was much liked by her dependents. She rewarded them generously and reproved them with firmness. Nothing escaped her notice; they all knew this, and acted accordingly. Her drawing-room did not possess—as her son had justly remarked—the modern stamp of luxurious comfort and picturesque disorder which is now the height of the fashion. It did not display that variety of arm-chairs and small sofas which seem made on purpose for people to doze in, or for whispering *apartés*. Round a table in the centre of the room seats were arranged, with a view to general conversation, which was always briskly kept up. It was in short a salon, and when the Marquise was at home visitors were never wanting.

The only drawback to Madame de Liminge's many great and good qualities was her conviction that she was always, or, at any rate, almost always, in the right on every possible

subject. This led to an entire want of comprehension of other people's views when they differed from her own; but in the ordinary course of life this marked feature in her character was not a source of discomfort to those she lived with. There was nothing extreme or violent in her opinions, nothing that was not just and kind in her conduct. She was never actuated by temper or caprice, so that although her wish was law, it never entered into the minds of her children or her servants to oppose it; they did not find her authority by any means irksome or oppressive.

When circumstances led her to think of adopting the orphan girl who was so nearly related to her husband, and of whom she knew so little, for the first time, perhaps, in her life she had a doubt whether she had not made a mistake in visiting on her brother-in-law's widow and child the wrongs which he had been guilty of towards his brother. The dignified and touching letter she received from Eliane's grandfather affected her very much, and the news of his death, which speedily followed, would have caused her real remorse

if she had not known that her answer had reached him in time, and that her warm-hearted and pressing invitation to him and Eliane to come and make acquaintance with her father's family had been the last earthly joy he had known.

But before taking any resolution on the subject, Madame de Liminge felt that she must make sure that the girl she was anxious to befriend would be a desirable companion for her daughter. This determined her to cross the Channel and fetch her herself. If any doubt remained on her mind after seeing Eliane, she meant then to take her straight to a good convent school instead of bringing her back to her own house. One glance, however, at the open and sweet countenance of her niece reassured her completely. There was something unmistakable in the expression of her face. It would have been impossible not to see in it that her heart was pure and her character upright. A very few days served to satisfy the Marquise that she was pious, simple, and modest. Her manners were not, perhaps, exactly what she considered perfect, but they were neither vulgar or affected, and

she was only too happy to bring back to her daughter so charming a friend. As to Blanche, she took at once the greatest fancy to her.

It was not an irksome responsibility that Madame de Liminge had assumed in becoming a mother to Eliane. Though Mr. John Maxwell's estates were strictly entailed, he had economized out of his income an ample provision for his grandchild, and she was to come into immediate possession of this fortune—not so large a one as Blanche was to inherit, but still a very fair one. “Had she been plain instead of remarkably pretty,” the Marquise said, “there would have been no difficulty in finding her a husband.” She meant soon to set about it, and to spare no pains to settle Eliane happily; but first she had to think of Blanche, and on the day in question she liked just as well that her daughter should have the field to herself.

Blanche came down to dinner dressed in a white silk gown and a blue petticoat, bows of the same colour in her hair, an animated expression in her eyes, and looking so pretty that there could be little anxiety as to the effect she would produce.

Madame de Liminge still preserved great remains of beauty, and had a perfect figure. She had never cared about her own looks. Even in her youth power had greater charms for her than admiration. She cared to rule more than to please; but her real goodness secured to her many friends, and she was loved as well as obeyed. On that important evening she too took some pains with her dress. In a black satin gown, with a becoming lace cap on her dark hair, slightly tinged with grey, she was a good specimen of matronly comeliness. At dinner, it was impossible not to notice that she was absent and nervous, and scarcely heard what was said. On her right sat her daughter, and next to her Eliane, in her plain grey gown. Opposite to her Raynald, and on her left Mademoiselle Silvestre and the Vicomte de Malseigne.

The dream of Madame de Liminge's life had been her daughter's marriage with Yves de Monléon. She had never seen him; but when Blanche was still in her cradle, the news of the Comte de Monléon's death, following closely on that of his wife, had made a great sensation in Parisian society. At first there had been

a report that he had destroyed himself; but it was afterwards known that he had long been subject to disease of the heart, and had suddenly expired immediately after the Comtess's funeral, leaving the care of his only son, then eight years of age, to the Marquis de Crécy, the husband of his deceased sister—an old gentleman without children, who lived a completely retired life at his chateau in one of the central provinces of France.

Since then, many a prudent and far-sighted mother had been on the look-out for this young nobleman. But Madame de Liminge was the only one amongst them whose ability or whose good fortune had enabled her to discover the only relative of the Comte's uncle who lived in Paris.

The Baronne de Crécy did not occupy at all a prominent place in society. Her husband had, indeed, belonged to the Marquis's family, but had disappeared from the world after doing his best to plague and ruin his wife, whom he had married for the sake of her fortune. She lived alone, and, in spite of his extravagance, was still in possession of ample means; but having scarcely any relatives, and

knowing but few people, she was particularly flattered by the amiabilities of the Marquise de Liminge, which at that time she could not suspect of having special motives.

Nothing was heard for sixteen years of either the uncle or the nephew ; but one fine day it became known that the former was dead, and the latter just arrived in Paris. That was about two years before the time we are speaking of. It was then that Madame de Liminge reaped the fruits of her patient foresight.

The Baronne de Crécy, as the nearest relative of the young Comte, was the first person he visited on his arrival. From that day her door was besieged, and the circle of her female acquaintances immensely increased. But these ladies had been forestalled. Madame de Liminge was her old and best friend. She had sought her out, of her own accord, when her nephew was a little fellow of whom no one was thinking ; and she proved her gratitude by warmly encouraging the Marquise's matrimonial projects ; who, in the mean time, had taken great pains to set on foot a very minute espionage regarding the character and doings

of M. de Monléon—a justifiable one enough, considering what was at stake in her future plans. All that she heard was satisfactory. There seemed no doubt that he was well principled, and his moral conduct irreproachable; and, moreover, he was considered by his neighbours and tenants at Crécy as a good and generous landlord, and was universally beloved.

All this, of course, confirmed her in her wishes, and in the hope that they would be realized. She turned a deaf ear to all the suggestions of her friends as to Blanche's marriage.

Unfortunately, the object of all these schemes did not afford any opportunity for their furtherance. He obstinately refused to make any new acquaintances, or even to set his foot in any salon—not even Madame de Crécy's. He paid her a visit on New Year's Day, but refused all her invitations, and ended by telling her that he did not mean to go anywhere until he had made up his mind to get married. But, at the same time, he gave her his word of honour that, when that time arrived, he would propose to spend the evening with her.

Well, that time had come ; and Madame de Crécy had told her nephew that he would meet Madame and Mademoiselle de Liminge, but that of course they had no idea of the kind. At such a moment, no wonder that the Marquise was not quite as calm and self-possessed as usual.

Eliane was, however, the only one of the party who perceived that such was the case, and it did not at all surprise her. It did seem to her strange that Blanche looked, to say the least, very well pleased. Her own thoughts were somewhat confused, what with the remembrances of that day, her conversation with Raynald, and all that Blanche had told her. She was almost as absent as her aunt ; Raynald was likewise somewhat silent. He was watching his cousin, and admiring the beauty of her side face. He longed to know what she was thinking of, or to guess at it by the expression of her eyes. Efforts at conversation were made, but they flagged. It was chiefly carried on by M. de Malseigne and Mademoiselle Silvestre, whose slow and formal utterances were not often so distinctly heard.

Just before dessert M. de Malseigne addressed to Raynald what, no doubt, appeared to himself an insignificant question.

“Do you, by any chance, know the name of that stout fellow with a black beard and red cheeks, who was last night in Madame de Bellière’s box at the Italian Opera?”

“No,” Raynald answered, in an absent manner; and then, as if waking from a dream, “Oh yes, I do; I asked somebody. He is that young Monléon, who never goes anywhere.”

“Then why was he in the box of that amiable bore?”

“She is a neighbour of his in the country; and then she is old and ugly, so he cannot be suspected of flirting with her, or of having matrimonial intentions with regard to Mademoiselle, *sa fille*, for she happens to have no children. He seems to have an equal horror of both those imputations. I heard all this from Henry Lahire. I don’t know how he comes to know him.”

There the subject dropped. Madame de Liminge and Blanche had managed not to betray any consciousness; but Eliane—less

used to be on her guard—blushed so deeply that both Raynald and M. de Malseigne noticed it, and spoke of something else.

Dinner was at last over; it had seemed to some of the party as if it would never end. At half-past eight the Marquise's carriage was at the door. She gave a glance at her daughter's dress as they descended the stairs, much as a superior officer makes sure, at the last moment, that there is nothing amiss in the accoutrements of a new recruit about to appear for the first time on parade. All was right. Blanche also looked at herself as they passed the pier-glass on the landing place, and away they drove to their destination.

Eliane went straight into the study, and Raynald and M. de Malseigne smoked their cigars in the garden.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH it was nearly nine o'clock, the last hues of the setting sun had hardly died away, and the room in which Eliane was sitting, which was on the western side of the house, enjoyed the full benefit of that lingering light. The garden of the Hotel de Liminge was so large that from the window of her apartment the eye rested on nothing but trees, grass, and flowers. It was one of those old-fashioned mansions which have almost entirely disappeared since Paris has been ruthlessly *embellished*. At that hour not a sound was to be heard from the streets, which in that part of the town were quiet even in the daytime.

As it grew darker Eliane, instead of lighting the candles, opened the windows, which in Paris are generally closed in summer during the heat of the day. A perfume of lilacs, roses, and pinks filled the room, and for an

instant she could fancy herself far from a town and a busy world, and in the home of her childhood. The tall Spanish chestnuts—not a leaf of which was stirring—reminded her of those in the avenue of the old manor-house. She almost reproached herself for having been distracted, even for a moment, on that day from the dear memories of the past.

The shades of evening were falling, and the stars beginning to shine. Throwing a light white shawl round her head, she went out on the stone terrace, and then down the flight of steps to a bench in the *parterre*, on each side of which were two long alleys of magnificent trees. There, in the deep silence which surrounded her, Eliane pondered over every word of her conversation with Raynald, and thinking of the interest with which he had listened to her sad tale, she said to herself :

“Dear Raynald, how very kind he was ! How grateful I ought to be that I have been made one of this family, and am treated by them as a daughter and a sister !”

From the first moment of their acquaintance she had thought her cousin pleasing, clever, and agreeable. On the previous evening they

had read together some of Tennyson's poetry, and it had given her pleasure to find that he spoke English well, and that he admired some of her favourite stanzas. But now a stronger feeling of sympathy seemed to have arisen between them—something beyond agreement in matters of taste and literature. With that lightning rapidity of thought which in an instant brings into our mind hundreds of things at once, a number of subjects occurred to her which she longed to discuss with him, as she had been in the habit of doing with her grandfather.

“He reminds me of grandpapa,” she thought, and then involuntarily smiled at the absurd idea of comparing her young and handsome cousin with a venerable old man like Mr. Maxwell.

Then perusing her meditations, Eliane began to think of Blanche ; but this soon brought back to her mind Blanche's brother. She wondered what would be his feelings on hearing that the “stout fellow” who had been mentioned so cavalierly at dinner was the husband chosen for his sister before she had even seen him ?

This led to other musings—other recollections—not quite unconnected with this subject. On one occasion when her grandfather had, as usual, refused an invitation to a ball given by one of their neighbours, and Madame Milsant, her old governess, seemed to regret it, he had said to her :

“It is of no use that Elly should make acquaintances in England. She is French. Her name is a great one in her own country. She will live and probably marry in France, where the customs in that respect are not, I am told, quite like ours.”

At the time only one thing had struck Eliane, and that was Mr. Maxwell's anticipation that before long she would lose his fatherly care. This had made her leave the room with tears in her eyes. But now she remembered his words, and, connecting them with her conversation with Blanche, she felt a sudden heartache.

Was it really true then that girls sometimes married men they did not know at all? Was it so unusual for a man to fall in love with a woman, and on that account wish to marry her, that any idea of such a thing was con-

sidered mere romantic nonsense, and equally preposterous the notion that it would be well for a woman before she engaged herself to a man to make sure that she could love him? Was it possible that her grandfather had expected that her future fate would be regulated according to those French received ideas, and that for that reason he had been so anxious not to let her mix in English society?

As this thought crossed her mind Eliane's face assumed a determined expression, which would have surprised those who had never seen in her anything but sweetness and diffidence. She clasped her hands together and murmured :

“ *Could* that ever be God's will ? ”

Meanwhile Raynald and Malseigne, having thrown away their cigars, were slowly walking back towards the house. Malseigne was always rather silent ; there was nothing, therefore, to wonder at in his taciturnity that evening. But this was not the case with Raynald. It was his habit to talk a great deal and very eagerly, especially when alone with his friend ; but he was evidently out of spirits, and very much pre-occupied.

"Who is that sitting on that bench just under the terrace?" Malseigne exclaimed, as they approached the steps. "Is it a human being or a vision?"

Raynald turned round and looked in the direction he pointed out.

"It is Eliane," he said. "You are quite right. With her veil round her head, and in that motionless attitude, she does look like an apparition."

They walked a few steps further; but Malseigne stopped and said:

"We had better not disturb her. How beautiful she looks! like the statue of a saint in prayer."

They turned into another alley.

"Have you any idea," Malseigne asked, "why she seemed so agitated when I spoke of Monléon? Do you suppose she knows him?"

"Oh no."

"Are you sure she does not?"

"She knows no one in Paris but our own acquaintances."

"But he may have been in England."

"Nonsense. I am sure he has never been there. It is impossible."

“Why is it impossible that a man whom we neither of us know should have made a journey to England?”

“How tiresome you are! Of course he might have done so; but I am convinced Eliane never met him—I feel sure of that.”

“Then her emotion was very strange.”

“Very strange, I admit; but I shall know to-morrow what caused it.”

“Shall you? How?”

“I shall ask her.”

Then the friends shook hands and parted.

Eliane, in the mean time, quite unconscious of having been observed, or of the discussion which her blushes had given rise to, went back into the study, closed the window, lighted the lamps, and tried to fix her mind on a book. But the effort was vain. She felt anxious and restless; and as she thought of Blanche and M. de Monléon, M. de Malseigne's words kept recurring to her mind.

“That stout fellow with a black beard and red cheeks.”

She could not help thinking that this was a disagreeable picture of a man.

“Poor little Blanche! I hope she will not

hesitate to say no if she thinks him too unpleasing. For my own part, that description would have been enough to settle the matter."

She threw down her book, and opening the pianoforte, began to hum and then to sing some simple ballads and popular hymns. Her voice was sweet and powerful, and she played well, but with more feeling and taste than brilliant execution.

For more than an hour she thus amused herself, and then the old-fashioned clock struck eleven. A moment afterwards Blanche came in.

"Well, my darling," Eliane exclaimed, running to meet her. "Blanche, my dear little Blanche, what has been the result? Tell me all about it."

"Well," Blanche answered, very composedly, "I think that I shall very soon be Madame de Monléon."

"Really! And how has it been so quickly decided?"

"Oh, it is not by way of being decided, but it almost comes to the same."

"And are you glad?"

"Yes, I am very glad. I should have been sorry if it had come to nothing."

Eliane again felt puzzled, and hardly knew what to say next.

"You know, Blanche, how dearly I love you, and how happy I should be if I was sure *you* were quite happy."

"Well, I am quite happy. I declare to you I am."

"But you look grave."

Blanche laughed at this, but soon became serious again.

"It sounds funny for me to be grave," she said. "But is it not enough to make one a little grave to think of being married? Only consider what a complete change it will make in my life, and in myself too; of the number of new and serious duties I shall have to perform. I am so young and childish, that the idea of it would frighten me if I had not great trust in God. But I know He will help me." As she said this Blanche looked at the ivory crucifix on the wall. "I am sure He will help me, for my only wish is to be a good wife and a good Christian."

"Yes, my darling Blanche," Eliane exclaimed. "If this is what you feel, I am sure you will be happy."

Her cousin's simple and earnest words made her appear in a new light. Eliane knew that she was pious, she had often seen her praying fervently in church ; but, on the other hand, she was so like a thoughtless child, and had spoken beforehand of an interview by way indeed of being accidental, but in reality carefully contrived in a manner which had not only astonished, but also a little scandalised her. But now this feeling disappeared. She did not understand Blanche any better, but she began to think more highly of her. Still, in the conversation which ensued she found matter for surprise.

“ Was *he* there when you arrived ? ” she asked.

“ Yes ; he and some other people had dined with Madame de Crécy. Mamma told me as we were going there that I should have no difficulty in making him out, because all the others would be acquaintances of ours. And so it was. I knew everybody in the room except one gentleman, who was standing near a window talking to old M. de Kerdrey. I guessed at once who it was, but of course I could not look much that way. Still, I observed

that when we were announced he turned quickly round and glanced at us. After a few minutes he came near where we were sitting, and Madame de Crécy introduced him to mamma. They conversed a little while, and it was easy for me then to look at him.

“And what is he like?” Eliane asked. “I mean what sort of person is he?”

“He is tall and rather stout; his hair and his beard are black and curly. I wish he was not quite so high-coloured; but altogether I think he *is* good-looking.”

“So much the better,” Eliane said.

The portrait corresponded exactly with her pre-conceived idea, and she rather wondered at Blanche’s conclusion.

“I saw he was watching me, and, later in the evening, whilst mamma and Madame de Crécy were talking together, he came up to the table where I was sitting with two or three other girls. We were looking at an album filled with photographs of remarkable people. He said, ‘That is M. Thiers.’ I felt that I blushed, and I answered that he was not at all handsome. ‘No,’ he replied; ‘but in the next page you will find M. Mignet. His

head is a very fine one.' 'Oh, yes,' I said, and went on turning over the leaves. I did not like to look at him straight in the face; but I thought he had a pleasant voice. Then I saw that mamma was preparing to go away, and saying good-bye to Madame de Crécy; I joined her, and we came down-stairs. He was in the hall, and helped us to find our cloaks. Mamma shook hands with him, and he bowed to me; that is all that happened. But as we drove home mamma said that he had positively told Madame de Crécy that he was so satisfied with everything he had heard about us, that unless there was something in my looks he disliked, he fully intended to propose for me."

When she said this, Blanche could not refrain from smiling, and Eliane smiled too.

"I suppose," the latter said, "that he was satisfied to-night on that point also."

Madame de Crécy thought so from the way he looked at me; indeed she had no doubt of it, and said that mamma might reckon on her coming here to-morrow to make, in his behalf, a formal offer. It seems, therefore, to be a settled thing."

Eliane tried to appear glad, but, do what she would, she could not help feeling a sinking of heart. It would have been foolish to pity her cousin for what she was so well pleased with ; and yet she did not know how to wish her joy. After a pause she said :

“ But when will you really make acquaintance with him ? ”

“ Oh, as soon as it is quite settled,” Blanche replied. “ We shall meet every day ; and he will send me a bouquet every morning. I dare say it will take two months to get my trousseau made.”

“ And if by any chance, when you see more of him, you should not like him, what would happen ? ”

“ Oh, that is not at all likely. He has a very good countenance.”

“ But still—”

“ Oh, if really, truly, I felt an aversion to him—”

“ Yes ; if you found out that he was stupid, or unamiable, or that your tastes did not agree ? ”

“ Oh, as to my tastes, I really do not know what they are. You know I am fond of a

number of things—such as music, and dancing, and other amusements—without really much caring for them ; I should easily give up those sort of tastes if my husband wished me to do so. It will be my duty to please him, and I shall try to make him happy.”

“If you did not succeed he would indeed be hard to please,” Eliane said.

As far as she knew, her cousin seemed to her too good for M. de Monléon.

“After all,” Blanche went on to say, “I do not care much about his being more or less clever. If there was any question of his being a bad man it would be different ; but I rely entirely on mamma’s judgment. She is so sensible and prudent, and so good a mother, that I am perfectly sure she would never have thought of M. de Monléon for me if she had not been certain that he was well-principled and kind-hearted ; so I cannot see on what account I could take a dislike to him.”

“But what I want to come to is this—should it happen, what would you do ?”

“What I should do ? Well, I suppose I should tell mamma, and she would break off

the engagement; but it is not in the least likely that this should happen."

Eliane did not reply, and the conversation would have come to an end if Blanche—who was not at all sleepy—had not wished herself to prolong it. As it was, the two cousins went on conversing till past midnight; then at last they went up the little staircase which led to their rooms.

Blanche was the first to go to sleep. Eliane remained a long time awake.

All the ideas that had ever crossed her mind as to the reasons that induced people to marry were thrown into confusion by what she had seen and heard that day. When she fancied herself in Blanche's position, and tried to imagine what would be her own feelings under such circumstances, she felt her heart rising against the thought of engaging herself for life in blind reliance on the opinion of others. And yet she could not but be touched by some of the things Blanche had said. In their first conversation on the subject she had thought her childless and frivolous, and even—at one moment—heartless; but that evening, though much that she had said appeared to her

strange, there was in it nevertheless a good deal of sense and straightforwardness. She could not but admire her childlike confidence in her mother, and her simple trust in God.

"She may be right," Eliane said to herself. "What I had imagined is perhaps a groundless fancy without anything corresponding to it in real life. In that case, what must I do? Submit to give it up, I suppose. At any rate, no one is obliged to marry."

This last reflection restored her mind to tranquillity, and she soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

THE first hours of the following day were spent much as usual. Raynald had not breakfasted at home. The Marquise, her daughter, and her niece were sitting round the table in the drawing-room when the Baronne de Crécy was announced. Blanche left the room, and Eliane followed her into the study. The two young girls awaited in silence, and with an almost equal anxiety, the result of the interview. They were not long kept in suspense. In about twenty minutes they heard the Baronne's carriage driving away, and the Marquise sent for her daughter. In a very short time they both came back to the study. Madame de Liminge looked beaming. Blanche was flushed and a little agitated, but happy also. The Marquise announced her marriage to Eliane, who, being duly prepared, did not

betray the amazement she could not quite get over.

Her aunt said that the news must be kept to a certain degree a secret till the next day, for that it was only in the evening that M. de Monléon was to be formally presented to Blanche as her *futur*.

"To-morrow," she added, "it will be publicly known ; but now I have to write to a number of friends who must hear of it from me, so that they may think themselves the first to be informed of this great event. Where is Raynald ? I must see him at once."

She rang the bell.

"Is my son come in ?" she inquired of the servant.

"No, Madame la Marquise."

She made an impatient gesture.

"As soon as he comes in let him know that I want to speak to him."

Then she hastily wrote on a visiting card, "Come this evening, we have a great piece of news to tell you," and ordered the servant to send it at once to the Vicomte de Malseigne's lodgings.

As she was leaving the room, Madame de

Liminge turned back and made a sign to Blanche that she wanted to speak to her.

"It is just possible," she whispered, "that after having seen Madame de Crécy, M. de Monléon may not wait until this evening to call upon us, so you had better not go out, and perhaps it might be as well to put on—"

"My embroidered muslin dress, mamma?"

"No; on the whole you had better remain as you are. Do not make any change; the colour of that gown becomes you; only, be in the way in case I send for you."

The Marquise's maternal previsions were realized. The decisive interview took place, not in the evening, but the afternoon of that day; not quite, however, according to the programme hitherto so carefully observed.

M. de Monléon arrived at four o'clock, and sent in his card. Whilst the servant was taking it up-stairs to the Marquise's private sitting-room, he saw an open door in the hall which led to the garden. Passing through it he came out on the terrace, and found himself, all of a sudden, in Blanche's presence. She was on her way to the *parterre*, with her straw hat on and a little basket for flowers on her

arm. Seeing a stranger on the terrace, she stopped short, and only recognized M. de Monléon when he came near enough to bow and to offer to shake hands with her.

She coloured up to the roots of her hair, and seemed inclined to run away. But in the voice which she had thought so pleasant on the evening before the gentleman good-naturedly said—

“You will not, I hope, refuse to shake hands with me, Mademoiselle, seeing that it is by your mother’s permission, and yours too, I trust, that I come here to-day.”

Blanche became a little more composed and gave him her hand. M. de Monléon kissed that pretty little hand and detained it an instant.

“And this hand is mine then, Mademoiselle? You consent to give it to me?”

Blanche did not well know how to word her answer. She said, “My mother . . .” and then hesitated.

“Your mother is so good as to accept me for her son-in-law, but she told me that before doing so she had made sure that you were willing to become my wife. May I ask you

to let me hear from your own lips that such is the case?"

Blanche said nothing.

"I beg of you, Mademoiselle, to give me that assurance; I hold to it very much."

Still no response.

"Mademoiselle," he again said.

"Yes," she at last answered, blushing deeply.

There the conversation ended, for Madame de Liminge, having been informed of M. de Monléon's arrival, hastened down-stairs. She was a little surprised to find that the regular course of proceedings had been thus forestalled, and so important a formality set aside. But she was too much pleased with this rapid accomplishment of her wishes really to care that the gentleman who had hitherto so scrupulously conformed to established customs had broken through them on this occasion.

M. de Monléon decidedly improved on acquaintance. There was no doubt that at first there was something undistinguished in his appearance. He was tall, but his figure was heavy. His jet-black hair and high colour gave a somewhat harsh look to his face; but in his eyes and mouth there was a friendly,

open, good-natured expression. Whether he was clever or not, or even if not clever at all, there was something about M. de Monléon which inspired confidence. It was impossible not to feel at one's ease with him. He had excellent qualities and some faults of character, but these defects were not of a sufficiently serious nature essentially to modify the first favourable impressions.

The Marquise's salon was filled that evening with visitors. Those favoured individuals to whom the happy event had been announced, so that they might each be the first to hear of it, hastened from sympathy or curiosity to pay their respects to the bride and her mother.

The announcement had also been made to the household, and, without waiting to be told, they had lighted twice as many wax-candles as usual, and added fresh bouquets to those already in the drawing-room. The beaming and excited countenances of those old and faithful servants plainly indicated that something out of the common way had happened. Mademoiselle was going to be married, and they already fancied themselves at the wedding.

In the midst of this excitement Raynald

seemed somewhat depressed. It had been late before he came in, which had a little annoyed his mother. She did not like him to be out of the way all the morning, and that morning his absence had been particularly inconvenient. He did not like to be reproached on that score, and his temper was not particularly serene when the Marquise, in a hurry to come to the point, told him, rather abruptly, that his sister was going to be married to M. de Mouléon, and that in an hour or two he would make acquaintance with his future brother-in-law.

"Blanche going to be married to M. de Mouléon!" he exclaimed, in a tone of great astonishment. "Is it possible?"

"Yes, I have just told you so."

"And are you pleased?"

"Of course I am."

"And what does Blanche say to it?"

"She is delighted, as is natural."

"And so is he, I suppose."

"Evidently, seeing that he has chosen her in preference to all the other girls in Paris."

Raynald remained silent a moment and then asked—

"What does Eliane think?"

"Eliane! What can she have to say to it? I really do not know what she thinks. We shall soon have to find her a husband, and then will be the time to consult her wishes. It never entered my head to ask her opinion about Blanche's marriage. But yours, my dear Raynald, I do want to know."

"What opinion, mother, can I have on the subject? I am not acquainted with M. de Monléon. I saw him for the first time the other evening, and I certainly did not admire his looks."

"He is considered handsome."

"That, of course, is a matter of taste; but if he suits you as a son-in-law, and Blanche thinks him pleasing, well and good. I should, perhaps, have liked my sister to marry some one I knew; but *you*, I suppose, do know him."

"Yes, I do," Madame de Liminge answered; "that is to say, I have heard enough of him to be perfectly satisfied with Blanche's prospects."

"And she has seen him and wishes to marry him?"

"I hope you know your sister well enough to be certain that on the subject of her mar-

riage she would never have a different opinion from mine."

"Oh I know this is the case almost always with girls."

"I flatter myself that you did not consider your sister as one of the romantic and independent young ladies who form an exception to the rule?"

"Certainly not," Raynald answered, with a smile. "So I have nothing more to say except that I am ready to be on the best terms with the brother-in-law so suddenly falling on me from the skies."

The introduction took place at the beginning of the *soirée*, and Raynald was much more favourably impressed than he expected by his future brother-in-law. Still he did not feel quite up to the general tone of gaiety, and withdrew into a corner of the salon, whence he could silently look at what was going on. It was the first time that he had witnessed the preliminaries of a marriage, and though he kept saying to himself that everything was for the best in this instance, that every one approved, and that his sister was satisfied, for it was impossible not to see that she was

thoroughly pleased, still he felt sad. There seemed to be a cold, heavy weight on his heart.

From his retired position he watched Blanche, on whose finger her *futur* had just placed a beautiful emerald ring, set with diamonds. In her white muslin gown and with natural flowers in her hair, she looked still very like a child. Her very youthful appearance was scarcely in keeping with the solemn engagement of which that brilliant ring was the visible token. She was talking merrily, and without any embarrassment, to M. de Monléon, and Raynald saw them move towards the part of the room where Eliane was sitting. She rose, and in the simplest manner possible shook hands with her cousin's betrothed. It was evident from her manner and her countenance that this was the first time they had met.

Though this left her emotion of the previous day unaccounted for, Raynald's spirits rose, and he looked at things in a brighter light. Why, he did not exactly know. He was very little in the habit of scrutinizing his thoughts or his feelings.

The engaged couple did not long remain with Eliane. Fresh congratulations were awaiting them at the other end of the salon, and afterwards they sat down on a sofa and had for the first time a *tête-à-tête* conversation.

Eliane had been sitting with Mademoiselle Silvestre at the tea-table near an open window, but, tempted by the beauty of the summer night, she went out on the balcony, where Raynald soon followed her.

"How fine it is!" Eliane said; "and what a joyful day this is! Ought I not to wish you joy? Your sister seems so happy."

"Yes, indeed, she does look pleased, and I am very glad of it. I love her dearly, and I could not bear to see her sad. There was, however, no danger of it."

"Why so?"

"Because she is one of those beings who seem born for happiness; their ideas of it can be so easily satisfied."

Eliane did not answer. All the thoughts that had passed through her mind the day before came back to it with renewed force, as well as the desire to speak of them to her

cousin; but now she felt timid about it. Whilst she was hesitating, he said—

“May I put a question to you?”

“Say what you like.”

“Well, yesterday, when at dinner I spoke of M. de Monléon, why did you colour and look nervous?”

The question was to the point, and the answer to it exactly what Eliane had been hesitating whether she would say or not. She turned away for an instant, and blushed as deeply as she had done the day before, for it suddenly occurred to her that this was a delicate subject to discuss with Blanche’s brother.

His curiosity was more strongly excited than ever, and, almost imperiously, he pressed for an answer. So at last she said—

“Blanche had told me of her intended marriage, and when, unexpectedly, I heard you speak of M. de Monléon, and not in a very flattering manner, it made, I suppose, the colour mount into my face.”

“Was that all?” Raynald asked.

“Well, not quite all. The fact is that yesterday I had for the first time learnt that

in France a man thinks of marrying a girl he has never even seen. When I heard M. de Monléon's name, the fear of betraying my astonishment, and something more than astonishment, at this, to me, quite new idea, disturbed my equanimity. I now perceive that what seems to me so strange is not only possible, but what everybody thinks quite simple. I must therefore conclude that I am wrong, or, at any rate, singular in my way of thinking. . . Now that I have told you this, and that we are speaking openly to each other, do you mind telling me what you think of this custom?"

Raynald had listened eagerly, and quickly replied—

"What I think? Why, I hate that custom, and will never conform to it."

Eliane exclaimed, "Oh, I am so glad!" without being exactly aware of the reason of her joy.

"For once," Raynald went on to say, "I can express what I feel on that point. Generally speaking, I never mention it, for the simple reason that my ideas and intentions would be considered absurd." He paused a moment,

and then added, "I mean to love the woman I marry; and, moreover, which is perhaps a wilder dream, I shall want to be certain that she loves me."

"I had always fancied," Eliane said, "that people married in that way, or else did not marry at all; I suppose this was from my want of knowledge of the world."

"No doubt. But shall you change your mind now? Perhaps you will. Everybody will tell you that you are mistaken."

"No," Eliane answered. "I am certain that, as far as I am concerned, I shall never change my opinion."

For a little while they both remained silent; not that the subject was by any means exhausted, but, in the words of a pretty French romance, "*être trop bien d'accord est parfois un danger.*" *

This may have been the instinctive feeling of both the cousins, for simultaneously they left the balcony and returned to the drawing-room.

The Marquise was more beaming, agreeable, and conversible than ever that evening, and

* "To agree too well is sometimes dangerous."

had not the most distant conception that a tiny cloud was gathering in the horizon, which threatened to obscure the rosy hues which at that moment were illuminating all her visions of the future.

CHAPTER V.

It was at the end of July that Blanche's marriage was to take place. The Marquise and her family remained in Paris during the intervening period, which was short enough for all the preparations so brilliant a wedding involved. The time did not appear long to any of the component parts of the little society at the Hotel de Liminge. Every day there were excursions into the country, or sight-seeing in Paris. Eliane had not yet seen all the beautiful places in the neighbourhood, or all the museums and interesting buildings in the French capital. This afforded scope for drives and expeditions of every description, which they all enjoyed, though in a very different manner.

In the morning Blanche tried on her dresses ; in the evening she examined the numerous presents which were showered upon her. She

enjoyed all this with her natural high spirits, and a childish glee ; but, likewise, with a real and earnest feeling of gratitude, for the anxiety she might have felt as to the approaching great event in her life was tempered by a daily increasing confidence in her future husband.

Yves de Monléon's good sense and good nature made him a general favourite, and in the course of their sight-seeing he evinced a considerable amount of information, especially with regard to the date of a piece of furniture, the style of a clock, or any work of art of that description. As to historical associations, or the beauties of scenery, he betrayed, indeed, a want of interest. He was wont to become absent when they were discussed.

It was Raynald and Malseigne who undertook to enlighten Eliane's eager curiosity on those sort of subjects. She was not very well informed, but most anxious to improve herself. If not taught a great deal in her childhood, she had been at least instructed in those things she did learn in a way calculated to excite a thirst for further knowledge. This, in a woman, is worth more in the eyes of men than a wonderful degree of learning.

Armand de Malseigne, reserved and silent as he was, and utterly indifferent as to what others thought of him, was, nevertheless, one of those men who are generally supposed to know everything. He had travelled and read so much, and amassed such an amount of information during his solitary and studious life, that there really was hardly any subject with which he was not, more or less, conversant.

As to Raynald, he had studied nothing very deeply, but he had a lively and quick intelligence, which readily mastered whatever came under his notice ; also the talent of expressing his ideas with an easy and fluent eloquence. These gifts he displayed during those long rambles amidst scenes which appealed in various ways to the imagination, and often led to discussion on topics of deep and vital interest.

Eliane lent an attentive ear to these conversations, which, on the contrary, rather bored Yves and Blanche. They were apt, when they began, to remain behind, and entertain each other with more congenial subjects of talk. Nothing of what is commonly called love-

making went on between them during these *tête-à-têtes*. What they spoke of were plans for the future; some of them rather frivolous and worldly, perhaps, but others also of a useful and generous kind. Sometimes they discussed the colour of their future equipages and horses; but oftener still they spoke of all that Yves meant to do for the benefit of his tenants and of the poor at Crécy; and then Blanche—not childish in those respects—listened eagerly, her laughing blue eyes and smiling face beaming with pleasure and sympathy; for if in her nature there was little of the poetic and imaginative element, her soul was fully alive to everything that had to do with religion and charity. Her opinions and her tastes entirely coincided with those of her betrothed, and there was, therefore, every reason to hope that happy days were in store for them.

In the mean time the weeks we are speaking of were full of enjoyment, not only to the engaged couple, but to all those around them. Eliane was now perfectly satisfied with regard to her cousin's future fate, and gave herself up

without forethought to the enjoyment of the present.

In the first phase of her life, full as it had been of quiet happiness, she had never experienced the peculiar and pleasurable influence of youthful companionship. Now, for the first time, what was pleasant in her daily existence mingled with vague hopes for the future, and gave a new and keen sense of enjoyment to every hour of the day.

Since her short conversation with Raynald on the balcony she had not spoken to him alone for a single instant; but the happy impressions of that moment had been continually renewed, so to speak, during the days they had spent in each other's company, surrounded by the fascinations of the fairest time of the year and the springtide of human life. Not that either she or Raynald coveted the sort of happiness of Blanche and Yves. Still it was happiness in its way, and so far enabled them, perhaps, to draw a picture of what would satisfy their ideal of earthly bliss.

Eliane did not analyze any of these feelings. She simply felt happy; and under the influence of this mental sunshine her beauty and he

ntellect expanded even as fruit and flowers ripen in a genial clime. Before the end of those delightful days another unexpected pleasure was in store for her.

M. de Monléon knew that Blanche rode very well. It was one of the things he had ascertained before deciding on the interview at Madame de Crécy's. He was himself devoted to field sports, and he wanted a wife able to share his pursuits. But Blanche had never been used to ride except in the country, and it was only after a long and arduous negotiation, during which Yves displayed an amount of obstinacy as conspicuous as his many good qualities, that Madame de Liminge at last consented to permit rides on horseback, but at so early an hour that no one would be likely to meet the equestrian party, composed of Blanche, her betrothed, her brother, her cousin, and M. de Malseigne, for Mademoiselle Silvestre, never in her life having ventured to mount even a donkey, could not be expected to act as chaperon.

Blanche—who looked very pretty on horseback—rode well and fearlessly. But she had not the perfect seat and complete command of

her horse which long practise had given to Eliane, with whom riding was not a talent; it had been, from her earliest childhood, a constant habit, and having been deprived of it for a year, she resumed it with delight.

These morning rides completed the enjoyments of that never-to-be-forgotten time, the pleasures of which were entered into with something of the spirit of children making the most of their holidays. To some of those concerned, that period proved the starting-point of years of happiness; to others, of a long series of trials; but whether looked back to in joy or in sorrow, its memory was never lost.

At the beginning of the third week of July—eight days before the one fixed upon for her wedding—Blanche went to the convent where she had made her first communion. She was going to spend those days in retirement and prayer.

After the last of their early rides, Raynald was breakfasting with Malseigne, whose apartment was near the Champs Elysées. After one of his habitual fits of abstraction, Malseigne said :

“How attractive courage and even daring

is in women, when it is united with gentleness and feminine reserve. People may say and like what they please about the charms of timidity and weakness; for my part, what I admire in a girl is energy and a capacity for self-control."

"I am quite of your opinion," Raynald answered; and assuming that his friend was speaking of Eliane, he went on to say, "She was charming yesterday when that clumsy school-boy pushed his horse against hers and made it rear; she looked so calm and unconcerned, and managed her steed so beautifully. And when Monléon was foolish enough to ask her if she had ever cleared a gate, how prettily she vaulted, like a bird, over the one in front of her. But there is nothing the least unfeminine in her looks, or bold in her manner. I have never seen any one at all like Eliane. Have you?"

"No; I have been struck with that lately. Until these last few weeks I really hardly knew anything of her except her looks. There is no doubt as to her beauty, and she is indeed a charming girl. I hope her fate will be a happy one."

Raynald assented to that wish, and there was another silence. Malseigne lighted another cigar and said :

"I foresee that your good mother, who rather enjoys matrimonial campaigns, and who has just achieved so great a success, will soon begin a similar one in behalf of her niece."

"You know as well as I do, Armand, how impossible that would be."

"I know what you told me of Mademoiselle Eliane's notions on the subject. But who knows? she may have changed her mind. What is going on under her eyes may have given her other thoughts on the subject."

"I do not believe it."

"Nor is it beyond the reach of possibility that something might be brought about in accordance with her English ideas."

"You mean that some one might fall in love with her whom she would really like?"

"Why not? Many things are more unlikely. A man might easily fall violently in love with her; and when a woman is passionately loved, she easily enough loves in return."

“Do you really think so?”

“Think so!—why surely you know better than I do that such is the case.”

“I used to fancy it. I always did; but now I begin to doubt it.”

Up to that time, Malseigne had been expressing his own thoughts in rather an absent manner, without paying much attention to his friend's looks or observations; but there was something in the tone in which he made that last answer which aroused his attention. Like a rider who allows his steed to wander at pleasure, but gathers up suddenly the reins when necessary, and directs him to a given point, Malseigne—who was singularly keen-sighted when not absent—turned round and stared at Raynald.

“You begin to doubt it?” he repeated; then striking his forehead, exclaimed: “What a blind fool I was. I now understand it all. You are in love with your cousin. This is too bad, too sad!”

Throwing away his cigar, he walked up and down the room greatly agitated.

Raynald rose also, and his face assumed the expression which anything of reproach or

unwelcome advice was wont to call forth. He crossed his arms and coldly asked :

“And why should I not care for her?”

“Because you must not—because you cannot marry her.”

“Will you be so good as to tell me why I must not marry her if she chooses to accept me?”

Malseigne stopped short and stood opposite to his friend.

“Because your mother will never—never, you may make sure of it—consent to your marrying your cousin.”

Raynald turned pale either with anger or inward suffering, his lips quivered, and he replied :

“I have told you, over and over again, that there is one point about which I am determined to remain master of my own fate. If my mother thinks of choosing and pointing out to me the woman I am to marry, for the first time in my life I shall resolutely set my wil against hers.”

“You would do quite right,” Armand said.

Raynald seemed surprised.

“You would do quite right not to let her

force you into a marriage against your wishes and your tastes ; but you would be wrong to give her intense pain by marrying against her will."

"On that subject I have a right to act as I please, and I am quite resolved to follow my own inclination."

M. de Malseigne thought it better neither to assent to this proposition or to dissent from it. He knew that to do the first would be dangerous, and the last useless. He therefore resumed his walk up and down the room and made no answer.

Armand looked upon himself, although he was only thirty-five years of age, as an old bachelor ; but he had none of the selfishness sometimes ascribed to those who have never known family ties. His attachments were strong, deep, and faithful, and far from troubling others with his own concerns, he had an almost unsurmountable dislike to speak of himself. Even those most intimate with him knew but little of his personal history. What they did know was, that his devotion to his friends was unbounded, his advice always prudent and wise, and his tact and delicacy of

feeling almost feminine when he had to console the sorrows of those dear to him. His skill and experience in dealing with such cases would have been enough even in the absence of other proofs to convey the impression that he had known himself much suffering. His father had been an intimate friend of the late Marquis de Liminge, and his intimacy with that family dated far back. His age, and still more his mature judgment, justified Madame de Liminge's entire confidence in him. None of her family secrets were kept from Armand, and he felt for her a sort of filial regard. On the other hand, he was young enough to be the friend of her children, whom he loved with almost parental affection. Though old in character and experience of life, he did not look so ; his hair was prematurely tinged with grey, but there was beauty in his regular features and noble countenance. At that moment it expressed amazement and anxiety.

Raynald would probably have fallen into a passion if the discussion had continued in the same tone in which it had begun. He calmed down, however, as soon as his friend left off arguing, and when Malseigne took

up a newspaper and settled himself in an arm-chair, as if he was not thinking of what they had been talking of, it was he who renewed the subject and opened his heart to his friend.

“The fact is, Armand, that for more than a month I have almost unconsciously gone on admiring and liking her every day more and more. I never asked myself whether I was in love with Eliane. I was simply captivated by her beauty, and delighted beyond measure with her character and mind. I felt that she was in every respect my superior, and that in her society I became less frivolous and a better man. I had never been so happy, and lived in a blissful dream. But now that you have roused me from that dream, why should it be a painful waking? why should not this dream become a blessed reality?”

Malseigne listened attentively to this explanation, and answered—

“For the reason I have already mentioned; **y**ou will never be able to overcome your **m**other’s opposition to it. I do not want to **a**rgue with you as to the justice or the **w**isdom of her objections. All I know is,

that she will never change her mind on that subject, and I therefore ask whether you are prepared to enter on a struggle which neither for you or for Eliane could lead to happiness. Would she ever endure to become the innocent cause of strife and sorrow in a home where she was so affectionately received at a time when the poor girl was alone in the world ? ”

“ She had a right to the place which she ought to have occupied amongst us long ago,” Raynald said with some bitterness. “ My mother was bound to atone for the neglect and indifference with which she and her grandfather had been treated, and it would be a still more cruel wrong to visit upon her the supposed offence of inspiring feelings I cannot control, and obliging her perhaps to sacrifice her own.”

“ But did not you say just now that you were not at all sure that she reciprocated your affection ? ”

“ I do not know that I said so, but I cannot deny it. I have no idea whether she likes me.”

“ You have never spoken to her then .

s you have now been speaking of her to me?"

"Never; I give you my word of it. But she had perceived what I feel for her—she had felt as I have done—what a blessed influence she has over me—if this had awakened in her that real and deep affection without which I know she will never marry. . ."

"The sacrifice would then, no doubt, be a terrible one, and I do not know that I should advise you to make it."

M. de Malseigne's voice trembled as he said this, and in his face there was an expression of intense suffering.

"Forgive me," Raynald replied; "I have given you pain. But I own that it was the thought of—I mean that I knew I could rely on your sympathy."

"Of course, my dear boy; I feel for you. But that is not the question. What we have to think of is your duty—what an honourable man ought to do under the circumstances. You are bound not to say anything to Eliane until you have obtained your mother's consent. As you have not yet committed

yourself, promise me that you will refrain from doing so, and that you will avoid everything that would betray to her the state of the case."

"Why do you ask me to make this promise?"

"Because, if my previsions prove true, and an insurmountable obstacle separates you, I am sure that you would not add to your own suffering the consciousness that you had disturbed her peace."

Raynald made no reply.

"Hitherto it is quite possible, likely even, that Eliane has looked upon you only in the light of a brother. I will do you the justice to say, that during all these expeditions we have lately made, I never noticed anything particular in your attentions to her; nothing which could have led her, or any one else, to suppose what I now know. She is so single-minded, so modest, so little occupied with herself, that I can easily imagine her ignorant of the feelings she inspires, and of her own perhaps. It is not, then, too late for you to refrain from what no right-hearted man should do. You have no right to

engage her affections before you are quite certain that you can marry her."

Raynald thought a moment before he answered.

"You know, Armand, all the respect and affection I have for my mother. I will not even discuss the question as to the possibility of her abusing—under certain circumstances—her maternal prerogative; but still this I will again repeat, if she wanted *to marry me*, as they say in Paris, according to her ideas, and not mine, that she did not leave me, at my age, sole master of my fate, you grant me, I hope, that my resistance would be justifiable?"

"Of course I do; but between that . . ."

"Yes, I know; between that and choosing a wife for myself—even were my choice the best and wisest in the world—against her will and without her consent, you see a wide difference. You think that affection and duty forbid it."

Malseigne made a sign of assent.

"Well, I can admit that distinction," Raynald said, "all the more so that Eliane would, I am sure, never marry me without my mother's consent."

“ I am convinced of it ; and all the stronger then is the reason for the promise I want you to make.”

Raynald shook hands with his friend and said :

“ I give you my word of honour that I will not say a word to Eliane until my mother agrees to our marriage. But I hope this suspense will not be long.”

CHAPTER VI.

RAYNALD was fully resolved to keep his promise, and to begin with he went out of town, which made it easier for the time being. His small estate near Erlon les Bois had been unexpectedly bequeathed to him, and he seized the opportunity to visit it. Thus he scarcely saw his cousin till the day of the marriage, and at the same time he escaped a little domestic collision which had arisen between his mother and her future son-in-law, whose pretensions she found out were as strong as her own.

M. de Monléon, we have already said, was what some people call obstinate, and others vain, and it was curious to observe the effect of this fault, or quality, whichever it was, in his intercourse with the Marquise. They had had a first encounter on the subject of the horses on horseback, and Yves had come out of

it with flying colours. Now another conflict between them was engaged on a still more important point, on which they were at issue.

He had shown how entirely he approved of the system by which a man can secure a desirable wife without the previous trouble of making himself agreeable and winning her affections. He thought that love only served to blind a person as to the most important decision in life, whereas information supplied by trustworthy individuals afforded much surer grounds for dispassionate consideration almost impossible in the other case.

As far as that went, his mother-in-law and himself were in perfect accord, and both of them, moreover, had an inveterate prejudice against England. Neither of them were acquainted with that country, but they disliked everything that savoured of its life and manners. Still, as a matter-of-fact, Monléon had unconsciously adopted some English ideas, and when this happened to be pointed out to him, he had sufficient strength of mind not to change his opinion. Madame de Liminge had in vain declared, *apropos* of the rides, that those were English manners, and that his

insisting on the subject was only worthy of an Englishman. He had held good, and she had yielded the point with the secret hope that no one would see or hear anything of these morning cavalcades.

But he was equally bent on following an English custom, not as yet generally adopted in France, and against which the Marquise had always set her face, and that was to depart with his wife on the wedding-day immediately after the ceremony, instead of being present at the great dinner and *soirée* which it was usual to give in honour of the marriage. He wished to take her first to Crécy and then across the Alps, in order, as he said, "to get over seeing Italy and to have done with it."

This announcement raised such a storm that Blanche was quite alarmed. She had never before seen any one oppose her mother's will ; and, on the other hand, she instinctively felt that her future husband had a very strong one of his own, which was likely to carry the day. She had recourse to M. de Malseigne, and Yves called to his assistance the Baronne de Crécy. For a few days a great many *pour*

parlers took place. Malseigne tried to persuade the Marquise that there was nothing unbecoming or unflattering to Blanche in the fact that Monléon wished for a *tête-à-tête* with her on their wedding day.

Madame de Liminge persisted that this was all very well for English girls, but her daughter fortunately was French, and she highly disapproved of that sort of thing. As to the Baronne, she admitted that her nephew was an *original*, but said he must be taken as he was, and that if he was compelled against his will to appear at a great banquet and assembly on the day of his marriage, he would behave in a way which would make them all uncomfortable.

"I should have thought," the Marquise replied, "that M. de Monléon was far too gentleman-like to exhibit on such an occasion any eccentric moroseness. No one would expect him, under the circumstances, to make the agreeable to the guests. He would sit at dinner by Blanche, and could talk to her all the evening if he liked. But to set off that way, and travel alone together, is to the last degree strange and unbecoming."

"I agree with you," the Baronne said. "But when an idea has taken possession of Yves' mind, it is better, I assure you, not to oppose him. In this case he would look so cross and gloomy that people would observe it, and in consequence might spread ill-natured reports."

"So they will if they go off in that English style, turning their backs on all their friends. I have no doubt that it will be disagreeably commented upon."

"That may be ; but the comments will be less offensive for your daughter than those I wish you to guard against. And there is one thing which you may be sure of. Whatever you may say or do, he will not change his mind."

This last argument had some effect on the Marquise ; but she was beginning to feel a little anxious as to the effect that Yves' desperate volitions might have on Blanche's future happiness, and she questioned her seriously on the subject. For although she had considered it quite right herself to choose a husband for her daughter, for the simple reason that she felt much the most competent

of the two to make a prudent selection, it did not enter into her mind to sacrifice or endanger her happiness ; and, however advanced matters might be, she would not have hesitated to break off the marriage if she had found her anxious and uneasy. But, to her surprise, this was by no means the case. Blanche's character was particularly gentle ; she had been used from childhood implicitly to obey her mother, and now she had no difficulty in practising this entire submission towards one whose authority she esteemed to be still more absolute. Hers was not one of those brilliant imaginations which are at once the enjoyment and the torment of their possessors. Her ideas were simple, positive, straightforward, and not at all complicated.

She had no sooner accepted M. de Monléon than she looked upon him as a new sovereign, to whom her entire allegiance was due. Finding that their feelings and tastes coincided, she soon reposed full confidence in him, found pleasure in submission, and had almost arrived at the point of thinking that he must be always in the right.

The Marquise discovered that, far from

being alarmed at his so-called eccentricities, Blanche was only afraid of her mother's thwarting his wishes. As to the point in question, had his opinion been the other way, she would have acted exactly the same. She was as little afraid of the *tête-à-tête* journey as of the traditional wedding festivities. All she cared about was that Yves should be satisfied, and no cloud obscure the quiet serenity of their mutual and increasing attachment.

The affair ended in a compromise. Madame de Liminge gave up the dinner and assembly and consented to the early departure; but, on the other hand, Yves resigned himself to a great breakfast at the Hotel de Liminge, where all the relatives and friends of both families were to be invited to see Blanche before her lord and master carried her away.

The day arrived—that day which so far resembles the last of our lives, that in both cases what looks so alike leads to such different results.

Blanche, in her bridal dress and with a pensive and serious expression in her lovely face, was standing in the hall by her brother's

side. Raynald was to give her away, and his countenance showed how much emotion he felt. As to Madame de Liminge, when she folded her daughter to her heart she found, as many poor mothers do, that the moment so anxiously anticipated, and at last arrived at, proves to be one of the most painful in their lives.

The bride was handed into the carriage, and they drove off to the church. A profusion of lighted candles on the altar gave it a festive appearance, and flowers without end scented the air with a delicious perfume. A large number of friends and acquaintances, most of whom had come to Paris on purpose to be present at this brilliant wedding, filled the front seats.

Blanche and Yves knelt on two *prie-dieus* within the sanctuary. His height and florid complexion had excited the admiration of the crowd in the body of the church, and, with some critical restrictions, that of the *beau monde* assembled for the occasion. It was observed that he pronounced the word *Yves* with considerable emphasis, and that he was the first to stand up at the reading of the

Gospel—certain indications of a despotic turn of mind. On the other hand, he prayed and genuflected during the mass, which was said after the nuptial rite, without either display or human respect.

Blanche's face, was hidden in her hands, and her tears flowed fast during the service. At the end of it she raised her head, and perceiving that her husband was waiting for her, she dried her eyes and smiled. Yves gave her his arm, and there was a general move towards the sacristy, where—according to a custom which, as Hamlet said of the detonations which accompanied his uncle's wedding, would have been more honoured by its breach than its observance—it is considered necessary to congratulate the newly-married couple, the attempt at which produces a general confusion and a complete forgetfulness of the sanctity of the place.

Owing to the number of persons gathered together on that occasion, the pushing and struggling of the crowd in the rear of the bridegroom and bride were greater even than usual. Eliane, who was not acquainted with the course of events, had not risen from her

place as soon as the other members of the family, and had seen them pass before her without knowing where they were going. First Blanche and her husband, then the Marquise, escorted by the old Duc de Longvilliers, who was nearly related to her son-in-law, then Raynald with an old lady—the Duchess of that ilk, followed by a young lady with a beautiful figure, sparkling black eyes, and long curls gracefully escaping from a charming little white hat at the top of her head, and falling on a lovely pink silk dress. After them came Madame de Crécy, whose flaming red gown, which though rather out of keeping with the time of the year, marked her out as one of the most conspicuous personages in the bridal *cortége*. Covered with *guipure* lace, and as many diamonds as it was possible to wear in the morning without egregiously transgressing the laws of good taste, she was radiant with delight, for she felt that after many fruitless efforts she had that day definitively taken her place in the aristocratic and exclusive circle of Parisian society.

Eliane was still in the same position, when a gentleman whom she did not know at all,

but who had evidently been watching her from a distance, rushed across rows of empty chairs to the corner where she was standing and offered her his arm.

Eliane accepted it with some hesitation at first, but afterwards with gratitude, for she now perceived, that in order to join her aunt and her cousins she had to make her way through a dense crowd.

"You ought to have followed Madame de Liminge at once," her companion said; "though indeed, for my own part, I rejoice that you did remain behind, as it has given me the opportunity of offering you my services."

Eliane answered this speech by a slight bow. Meanwhile the stranger was vigorously elbowing the lookers-on who were impeding their progress.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur; allow me, madame; permit us to pass. Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle; here we are in front. Take care no one passes before you. These people have no right to be here. It is really scandalous; one might fancy oneself in the street."

Eliane said nothing in reply to all these exclamations. She was rather bewildered, and did not quite understand where they were going. At last she ventured to make the inquiry.

“There, Mademoiselle; there, into the sacristy—you see the door of it now. We shall get there in time, when the hundred and fifty persons still before us have offered to the Comte and Comtesse de Monléon a hundred and fifty additional congratulations.”

Eliane made no remark; but after persevering a few minutes in the onward struggle, she stopped short and said:

“After all, I do not see why I take so much trouble to get to Blanche just now. They will soon be going home where I shall see her much more pleasantly than here in this crowd.”

“Would you like better, Mademoiselle, to wait here—in a corner of the church? I would come and fetch you when it is time to go.”

“Oh, yes, I should like it much better,” Eliane answered; and leaving the arm of her

guide, she darted out of the crowd, and seeing a chair by a pillar near a side chapel, she went and knelt there. Her unknown companion followed her.

"Then you will remain here," he said, "whilst I plunge again into the stream and try to find Madame de Liminge. In the mean time, I beseech you, do not stir from this place."

"I will not; and if you can see my aunt, will you tell her where I am?"

"Of course I shall. You need not be afraid."

"I do not know how to thank you."

"I desire no thanks, Mademoiselle. I have been only too happy to be permitted to escort you, and I shall be equally delighted to come and fetch you."

Eliane looked at him somewhat more attentively in order to make sure of knowing him again. He was fair, neither handsome or plain, wore a beard, and looked gentlemanlike. She followed him with her eyes till he disappeared in the crowd, and then thought no more of him.

Alone in that solitary corner, Eliane rested

her forehead on her hands and felt a sense of relief. She had a natural and singular power of abstracting herself from outward things and concentrating her thoughts on the invisible world—of communing with God and her own soul. She breathed more freely outside the scene of noise and confusion she had just left.

Although her education had made her in many respects superior to the generality of girls of her age, the seclusion in which she had lived had kept her, on some points, in a state of primitive simplicity. Her tact and reserve alone preserved her from betraying a profound ignorance as to the customs and habits of the world, and from saying and doing awkward things. The retired existence she had led in France—for her aunt and herself had agreed that she should not go out till the year of her mourning was over—had prolonged that state of things.

Her grandfather had not, perhaps, sufficiently considered, when he precluded her from acquaintance with English life, that she had been left to imagine a world of her own, unlike anything really existing, either in

England or abroad. At any rate, he had not thought this of any great consequence, and perhaps he was right.

Eliane possessed, young as she was, a gift which indeed a child may have, for it is one of those which the Holy Ghost imparts to the soul in baptism—that wisdom which enables us to measure the good and the evil of this life according to the Divine estimate of their value. She had grown up without any idea that it could be difficult practically to carry out this principle in all its simplicity. This was, no doubt, an illusion, but one which originated in the highest notions of truth. And though Eliane's imagination was lively and poetic, truth was what she most cared for, and even the visions which raised her mind beyond and above this world were all grounded on the realities of faith. As to the dreams with which most young girls amuse themselves, she was but little given to indulge in them. Her thoughts were wont to soar towards objects of the highest worship which made her forget herself, or were engrossed by a passionate solicitude for others. She could not be said to be *romantic*, but in the good

sense of the word, she was perhaps what the French call "*exaltée*."

Nowhere could the world have been her element, and in the atmosphere of Parisian society, which she was often told was the best in existence, she sometimes felt as a person does who in a crowd pants for fresh air.

This discomfort—not to say suffering—had, however, vanished during the weeks which had just elapsed. She had been much out of doors, had taken exercise like in old days, seen again green fields and woods, and, above all, enjoyed freedom of intercourse with congenial minds. When Armand chose to speak, every word he said was worth listening to; and as to Raynald, although his chief care was to draw out his friend and to exhibit, as it were, his superiority over himself, he was so unaffected, so intelligent, so right-minded, so kind, that she was beginning to feel a real affection for him. They understood each other better than she and Blanche did, great as was the attachment between them.

Eliane had obtained leave to pass in the convent the days of her cousin's retreat, and

deeply she enjoyed that short interval of solitude and silence, for even an hour's recollection was wont to awaken in her heavenly thoughts, which, like a choir of invisible angels, transported her into regions of eternal bliss. This gift of fervent devotion, this power of raising her spirit on the wings of prayer, was for this orphan girl a hidden fount of strength and happiness. Like living water in the natural world, it imparted to her character vigour, freshness, and a quiet energy, the calming and animating influence of which was felt by all those about her, whilst to her own soul it gave a peaceful joy.

After that time of refreshing repose, the inevitable bustle and agitation of the days before the wedding were rather oppressive. On the evening when the contract of marriage was signed, she had found herself for the first time in the midst of a large party.

Blanche had appeared that night in a toilette which was no longer that of a young girl; nor had Eliane ever been dressed as she was on that occasion. For the first time, too, she could not but notice that her looks

attracted a great deal of admiration. The most careful self-watchfulness does not always prove a safeguard against the pleasurable emotion which this awakens. Was she quite free from the influence of this feeling? Perhaps not; still at that moment it disturbed more than it pleased her. This worldly excitement jarred on her mind, so lately occupied with other and higher thoughts. It was as if a loud dance-music had suddenly succeeded the solemn strains of an organ.

Now, at last, she was alone for a little while, and could collect her thoughts. Her nervous agitation subsided, the distractions of the last days lost their effect upon her mind, and allowed her to think and to pray as she wished to do, at such a time and in such a place.

CHAPTER VII.

RAYNALD had deposited the Duchesse de Longvilliers in a safe position, and resumed his place by his mother's side, and near the new-married couple. Leaning against the wall, and at liberty to look about him, he watched the crowd struggling at the door and then penetrating into the sacristy. Many rows he had to make, and much shaking hands to go through, and in the mean time his eyes were anxiously fixed on the diminishing number of persons still in the doorway. He had caught sight in the church of a little pink hat, which had not reappeared. The line nearly came to an end, but no sign of the said hat or its wearer was visible, far or near. A young man who was hurrying past him stopped to shake hands, and say,

"I wish you joy, Raynald."

"Thank you, Horace. How long have you been in Paris?"

"Only since yesterday. I came on purpose," and he went to speak to the Marquise, who, when she saw him, exclaimed with glad surprise,

"M. de Tréval! How delighted I am to see you. I did not know you were in Paris."

"I came on purpose to wish you joy. . . . And I must tell you"

Raynald had not been attending to what was said, but his cousin's name struck him, and he turned round to listen. His mother's answer he heard.

"Oh, thank you, M. de Tréval. It was very kind of you. Wish our young couple joy, and then will you, please, go back to my niece, and tell her that in a few minutes all the crowd will have dispersed, and we shall be able to cross the church. Then will be the time for her to join us. We reckon upon you, of course, for breakfast."

The Comte de Tréval did not wait to be told twice to go on his errand. He bowed a hasty acceptance of the Marquise's invitation and hurried away.

A few minutes afterwards, as Raynald was taking the Duchesse to her carriage, he saw him leading his cousin down the steps to the place where Madame de Liminge was waiting for her. Blanche and her husband had just driven off, the Marquise was preparing to follow them, and was only waiting for her niece, who soon joined her. M. de Tréval asked to be formally presented to Eliane, who again thanked him for his kindness, and then was handed by him into the carriage. She sat in the place which Blanche had occupied an hour before, Raynald was seated opposite to her. The Marquise was in a state of intense excitement, and, as was always the case when things went according to her wishes, she talked a good deal.

"Dear child," she exclaimed, as they drove home, "what a blessing it is to think that her future is so bright and happy! How pretty she looked; and he appeared to great advantage too! Those who saw him for the first time thought him very handsome. Several people told me so. But it is, after all, a sad thing for a mother to marry an only daughter. It is only mothers who can

understand this mixture of feelings." She smiled, but tears came into her eyes. "I am glad I keep you, Eliane, at any rate for a while. As long as you remain with me I shall feel that I still have a daughter."

Eliane fondly kissed her aunt's hand. Neither of them noticed the impression her words made on Raynald.

Once at home, the Marquise had no time to indulge in sentiment. Everything was beautifully arranged—the drawing-rooms full of flowers, the windows wide open. An invisible orchestra performed charming airs in the garden. There was a look of festivity in the whole scene which is now out of fashion. The society was numerous and brilliant; the breakfast perfect, and enlivened by animated, but not too noisy, conversation.

Yves often glanced at the clock, but manfully endured the length of the meal, and the subsequent civilities he had to pay and to respond to. His *ennui* was a little betrayed by the eager manner in which, when the hour had arrived, he reminded his wife that it was time to change her bridal toilette for her travelling dress.

Blanche rose immediately. Eliane followed her into her room. The young girl and the young wife remained a few instants alone together in that room which they had shared for a year in such pleasant intimacy. Both were too much moved to speak. Blanche seemed then to realize fully, and for the first time, the importance of the change in her destiny which that day had wrought; and when the time arrived for bidding farewell to her mother, her brother, and the friends of her childhood, and to take a final leave of the home where she had been so fondly cherished, the somewhat childish confidence with which she had, up to that instant, thought of the future, forsook her. The sudden swelling of her poor little heart was followed by a violent fit of crying, and as she clung to her mother's neck, it was almost with terror that she thought of being taken away from her, and all those she had hitherto loved and cared about.

M. de Monléon had not any extraordinary delicacy of feeling, but with the tact which belongs to a good heart, he allowed her to weep for some time without restraint in her

mother's arms. At last, in a gentle but ~~but~~ authoritative manner, he said :

"Come, Blanche, we must go."

The rest of the company had kept aloof ~~to~~ during these last adieux, and soon took leave ~~of~~ of the Marquise, who was going away that ~~at~~ evening.

What with joy, grief, and agitation, she was in a sort of moral fever which precluded thought. Her heart was conscious of a great void, but she did not allow herself to dwell upon it until she could be alone, and free to give way to her feelings. On the whole she was happy and perfectly well satisfied, not only with the event of that day, but with new projects for the future which she had conceived within the last few hours. Without too great an effort, she made herself agreeable to her departing guests, the last of whom was Horace de Tréval. As he was bidding her good-bye, she said to him :

"You know that it only takes two hours to go from Paris to Erlon. It would be very kind of you to pay us a little visit."

"I certainly will, as you are so good as to invite me."

"Next week you would find with us the Duc and Duchesse de Longvilliers and their granddaughter, Armand de Malseigne, and a few other friends."

"I do not want any additional inducement to pay *you* my respects, Madame la Marquise."

Eliane was standing near her aunt. He bowed to her, and according to English habits, she offered to shake hands with him. He seemed to her in the midst of all the strangers she had seen that day almost an old acquaintance; but it took her by surprise when, in an eager but respectful manner, he kissed the small hand held out to him. She withdrew it somewhat abruptly, and when he was gone said to Raynald:

"That M. de Tréval is either too respectful or too familiar."

"That was because you were too civil to him," he answered, with more vivacity than he would have wished.

The fact was, that his friend Horace had contrived to sit at breakfast by Eliane, and this had rather provoked him. He was, however, in high spirits, and delighted to go to Erlon with her. What his mother had said

in the carriage had raised his hopes, and Armand's previsions were forgotten, though not his promise to him. For the present, he resolved to observe it strictly. Nor was the effort a painful one. As long as the actual state of things lasted, and he had the full enjoyment of his cousin's society, and looked forward to a still happier future, delay could be borne.

During the intervening time between the festivities of the morning and her departure, the Marquise began to feel the reaction which always follows great excitement. Without any officious or apparent solicitude, Eliane spared her aunt all fatigue, and contrived to occupy and interest her mind, and not to leave her alone. Yet so unobtrusive were her attentions, that they escaped observation even while they gave comfort.

It was getting dark when they started, and after a journey of two hours the travellers arrived at Erlon. Eliane had never been there before. She followed her aunt across a large vestibule, into a lofty room hung with red damask. Over the chimney there was a large, full-length portrait of Raynald

at the age of eighteen. This salon was dimly lighted by a single lamp, but the evening was fine, the windows still open, and the general features of an extensive view discernible. Eliane looked at the massive groups of trees and the rising hills beyond them. A perfume of mignonette and heliotrope reached her. She felt happier than she could account for. Love of the country in some people almost amounts to a passion : this was the case with Eliane. It so happened, that since her arrival in France her aunt had not left Paris. She had not much looked forward, however, to this change of scene, partly because she scarcely had time lately to think of herself, and also because the parting with Blanche had been a sad one. She had rather dreaded that first evening in a new abode without her cheering companionship. She was very fond of Blanche, and no one in France had shown her so much affection as her young cousin, and yet she felt strangely happy that night.

There is, no doubt, in some chosen souls a sort of love for the works of God in the visible world which, when sanctity is added

to it, enables them to hold mysterious communion with the whole of creation—the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds of the air, and the animals who sometimes look at us with such a wonderful expression of sympathy. St. Francis of Assisi used to call all those creatures of God his brothers and his sisters.

Eliane, in her measure, knew something of this feeling. A life in the country was full of interest to her, and she could not conceive that ennui was possible in the midst of the beauties of nature and the thoughts they awaken. But another source of joy was unconsciously and vaguely mingling with these impressions.

Raynald had been very animated and agreeable during the brief journey. He also was in high spirits. She could not see him during the time they were in the train, but she listened to his voice; and though he did not directly address her, all he said seemed to answer to her own thoughts. There could be no doubt that she enjoyed the feeling that he was there, that they were going to be together in the country—that they would,

perhaps, take walks and converse together as they had done in Paris. For a fortnight—so faithfully had he kept his promise—she had scarcely seen him, and without distinctly acknowledging to herself how much she missed him, she certainly had longed for a renewal of their intercourse.

Many thoughts passed through her mind—for they are apt to crowd upon it at such moments—whilst she stood at the open window. But her attention was soon diverted by the movements of Mademoiselle Silvestre, who was busy distributing and arranging the contents of a large trunk in the salon and the adjoining library, which was her aunt's own sitting-room. She was going backwards and forwards with inexhaustible activity, never supposing it possible that she could be tired, and only intent on sparing others fatigue. Eliane insisted on sharing her labours.

“Allow me, Mademoiselle Silvestre, to carry those books. Where am I to put them?”

“On that table near the arm-chair.”

“And this dressing-case?”

“It is too heavy for you, my dear young lady.”

Eliane smiled and took it from her by main force.

"Where is it to stand?"

"On the *console* in the next room, and that other box on the shelves."

"And this little clock?"

"On the chimney; Madame la Marquise attends to those things herself."

"Which means that *you* look after them?"

"Very often I do. I hope poor Julie is having her supper; she was dying of hunger."

"And you are, perhaps, in the same state?"

"No, I am only rather tired."

"I should think so indeed. You were up before it was light this morning."

"Well, I really could not sleep during the night before that dear child's marriage. But, thank God, she will be happy. . . . Where are they now, do you suppose?"

"I think they were to arrive at Crécy about this hour."

Eliane was meantime continuing to unpack.

"What shall I do with this?" she said, holding up a red morocco-case.

"Give it *me*," the governess exclaimed. "I want to look at her picture."

The case contained miniature portraits of Blanche and Raynald.

"Are they not lovely?" she said.

"Very beautiful indeed," Eliane answered, and gazed for a moment on the two likenesses.

"Where are they to be placed?"

"Give them to me. I will put them on the little table near the dear Marquise's *fauteuil* . . ." She tried to get up. "Oh, I am really very tired," the good woman said, finding it difficult to rise.

"Well, then, do sit down, dear Mademoiselle Silvestre, and let me finish what there is to be done."

Mademoiselle Silvestre was obliged to follow this advice; but as soon as she leant back in the arm-chair her eyes unwillingly closed, and she fell nearly asleep. Eliane saw that her old friend was completely knocked up, and gently rousing her, she insisted on her going at once to bed, and promised that she would arrange everything and look after her aunt until Julie returned.

"Thank you, my dear, you are very good;"

and, unable to keep her eyes open, the good lady was conducted by Eliane to her own room and assisted into bed.

Having accomplished this she went back to the drawing-room and arranged all the contents of the trunk according to the best of her ability and taste.

The Marquise, in the mean time, was resting on a sofa, and the servants preparing a light supper for the travellers. Raynald had come in surreptitiously, and was standing by the chimney watching all Eliane's movements as she went from one corner of the room to the other, or passed in and out of the adjoining chamber. She had thrown on a couch her hat and her cloak. Her brown travelling-dress was of the simplest description, and her hair not in the best order. But notwithstanding this, or, perhaps, on that very account, her cousin had never admired so much the grace and symmetry of her figure, the charm of each of her movements. If Raynald had been a poet he would, perhaps, have compared her in his mind to a nymph or a goddess; but, satisfied with less fantastic dreams, he vowed that no one but that lovely and fascinating

girl should be the mistress of a place which her presence was already transforming into a Paradise.

Erlon les Bois belonged to Raynald ; but, having hitherto cared little for the country, he had given it up to his mother until the time when he should marry, and, residing there, assume the management of his property. .

The clock struck ten. Eliane had just finished the arrangement of her aunt's room and came back to the drawing-room. The Marquise raised herself on her couch and said,—

“You had better sit down to supper, my dear children. I shall remain on the sofa. Send me only a glass of wine and a biscuit. Where is Silvestre ?”

Eliane explained her non-appearance, and then seated herself, nowise reluctantly, at a little table in the corner of the dimly-lighted salon. Raynald did likewise. The meal was at first rather a silent one. Then they spoke a little, but like people who have too much to say to know where to begin. At last the conversation became more animated. In that large drawing-room, with scarcely any light

but that of the two candles on the table where they sat, it felt like being alone together, which had not happened since their long conversation in the study at Paris.

What a change had come over Raynald since that day! Not a single word betrayed his secret; but his countenance and his voice, his high spirits, were significant. On the other hand, Eliane's joyous excitement, her sweet face and bright smiles, made even the most common-place remark attractive.

As he looked at her, as he listened to what she said, Raynald kept thinking that, perhaps, at no distant day she would occupy by right that place opposite to himself, and that the delightful vision before him would become an abiding possession. Happiness sometimes hovers, as it were, over a man's fate. It seems as if a word would be enough to make it his own. But sometimes a sense of duty, and sometimes a want of courage, stops the utterance of that word. The vision disappears; a life which promised at its dawn to be blissful and serene becomes anxious and sad, and, in some instances, no light similar to those bright hues of unfolding day ever shines

again upon it during the whole course of its weary length.

The Marquise left her sofa, and leaning on the arm of her niece, she walked into her bed-room. As she entered it she was struck with something prettier and more comfortable than usual in its aspect, and noticed a slight scent of roses.

"You have been at work here, Eliane," she said. "And that bouquet before my darling's picture, did you put it there?"

"I brought those roses from Paris, and as they had kept their freshness I thought this was the right place for them. Do not you think so, dear aunt?"

The Marquise kissed her niece.

"Your taste is excellent, my love, and so is your heart, which is better still. God bless you, my child. Go to bed now. I have given you Blanche's room. Here is Julie; she will show you the way to it."

Eliane bent down to kiss the hand kindly held out to her.

"You have nothing else for me to do?" she asked.

"No; but I have to thank you, my dear.

Nothing, I assure you, escapes my notice. You have been an angel of goodness to me all this day, and, owing to you, my arrival here has not been a sad one." Then embracing her again, she added, "Would you were my daughter, dear Eliane, I should like never to part with you."

Raynald had followed his mother into her room. He was standing behind her arm-chair. Those words made his heart throb as it had done once before that day; but this time he was not the only one whom they affected. Eliane's heart was also beating fast, and when she met the eyes of her cousin her own were quickly bent down with an embarrassment she had never felt before.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAD Madame de Liminge had the slightest notion of the hopes which her words had raised on two different occasions that day, she would not have fallen asleep under her green damask curtains in so quiet and happy a frame of mind. It may seem strange that so natural an idea never occurred to her, and that a person of so much good sense and experience should not have been alive to the danger of placing her son in constant communication with a girl of whose mind, character, and remarkable beauty she was the first to rave about; but with all her knowledge of the world, there was one sort of insight which the Marquise did not possess. She had none of that quick perception which results from an attentive study of the character of others. Her husband, an amiable, generous, and indolent man, with far less capacity for business

than his wife, had surrendered to her, from the earliest days of their marriage, the whole control of his house and family. Her habits of governing, and governing wisely, had made obedience easy to all about her, and she had never given herself the trouble of studying the characters of those she had to deal with. Never having met with opposition or obstacles to her will, she had not been accustomed to anticipate them, or even to take into account such a possibility.

Her children had always shown her the utmost respect and a boundless affection ; and if it had rather surprised her that Raynald at the age of twenty-four should have originated the idea of a journey to the East, and a long sojourn in Italy, this plan, as it happened to coincide with her own wishes, which were to get him to leave Paris at that time, met with her approbation, and raised no difficulties. It answered, in fact, as well as if she had herself suggested it.

During his absence she had not been remiss in forming projects both for his future destiny and that of Blanche. It was all settled beforehand in her own mind. Blanche was first to

marry M. de Monléon,—as yet a perfect stranger to them both,—and a few months afterwards Raynald, who would then be fully twenty-six years of age, would seek and obtain the hand of the beautiful heiress, Constance de Longvilliers.

In the mean time she had got some mutual friends to sound the Duc and Duchesse on the subject. The eagerness with which the latter had accepted an invitation to Erlon les Bois was a sufficient security for the favourable result of the more direct negotiations she resolved to set on foot.

Hitherto everything seemed to promise full success to her plans. But since the morning a new project had sprung up in Madame de Liminge's active brain. She had not failed to observe M. de Tréval's attentions to her niece, and this had been enough to set her imagination at work, and to give birth to additional combinations, which she thought would be the natural sequel of already existing facts. It was this scheme—the success of which she never doubted—that had made her sigh so deeply when she expressed regret that Eliane could not always remain with her.

What would Raynald have thought could he have guessed it? What would Eliane herself have thought?

It was the brilliant match she had in view for her which, according to the Marquise's expectations, was so soon to deprive her of her niece. M. de Tréval was rich, well born, and well thought of by his friends, and by the world considered a gentlemanlike and agreeable man. He was eventually to inherit the title of his uncle, the Duc de Longvilliers.

To find, without any apparent difficulty, a *parti* for Eliane almost equal to the one she had secured for Blanche was indeed a wonderful stroke of good fortune. One victory following another so closely in the matrimonial field astonished even her sanguine nature. She foresaw the envy which other people would feel, and generously forgave beforehand all the ill-natured things that would be said about it.

These reflections led to the conclusion that she must at once speak to Raynald, and prepare him to turn to the best account Mademoiselle de Longvilliers' sojourn under his roof.

Whilst the Marquise was asleep dreaming about her son, her son was dreaming too, but wide awake. Sitting at an open window with a cigar in his mouth, he was preparing for his mother a still greater surprise than the one she had in store for him. He had resolved to open his heart to her the very next day, if possible; for now that he was going to be continually in Eliane's society, he felt that it might become impossible to keep his promise to Malseigne. A still more powerful inducement than that promise had hitherto, perhaps, enabled him to adhere to it. This was a terrible fear lest his friend's previsions should prove well-founded. What would he do then? He did not like to face that question; but, at any rate, he knew that as long as he remained in doubt on that point it would be impossible to speak to Eliane. It had not, indeed, prevented him enjoying her society during the last three months in Paris; but at Erlon it was different, and he had also conceived a sort of hope that his mother, instead of thwarting his wishes, would meet them half-way. He had thus understood the affectionate and flattering words she had said to

Eliane; and this it was which had given speaking an expression to his eyes when, at that moment, he looked at his cousin. The remembrance of that glance continued to haunt her long after she had retired to rest. It did not awaken very definite expectations, only a vague idea of possible happiness.

Short as her night had been, Eliane rose nearly as early as the sun. She longed to throw open her window and to see by broad daylight what she had only dimly discerned the evening before. Great was her delight at the view which met her eyes. A thin veil of mist still hung over the broad valley and the graceful meanderings of the Seine, which extended beyond sight. But the wooded hills in the distance, the trees of the park, and the neighbouring forest, were already gilded by the first rays of sunshine. The flower-beds under her window sent forth a delicious perfume; the green lawn which divided the *parterre* from the river-side road sparkled with dew; the birds were beginning to sing, and the busy insects to hum.

With silent rapture Eliane drank in the sweet morning air. She could not tear herself

away from that sight. She was glad to exist and to be young; glad that the weather was so fine, and her heart so full of joy—why and wherefore she could not tell. All she felt was, that never before had she been so happy.

The stable clock struck seven. The young girl left her room and went down-stairs, shutting softly the doors behind her in the full belief that she was the earliest riser in the house; but no sooner had she set her foot out of doors than she met Mademoiselle Silvestre, quite recovered from her fatigue of the previous day, and, as was usual with her in the country, on her way to the kitchen-garden and the poultry-yard.

The good lady was delighted to find that her favourite occupations were quite in Eliane's line. She liked gardening, and took an interest in all the living things, whether in the stables or the hen-house. This raised her still higher than before in Mademoiselle Silvestre's estimation. They were proceeding together in high spirits to the kitchen-garden, when Raynald unexpectedly appeared on the scene.

“What you, M. Raynald,” the old governess

exclaimed, "actually out of doors at seven o'clock!"

"You may well be astonished," he answered, "but I awoke early this morning, and could not go to sleep again, so I took it into my head, as it was so fine, to have a ride into the forest before any one else was up."

"To accomplish that," Eliane said, with a smile, "you must have been still more active."

As she was speaking his English groom brought Raynald his horse. She stroked its mane, and declared that Chamyl looked quite elated at the prospect of a good gallop in the beautiful woods at that hour of the morning.

"No wonder," she added. "He is a very lucky horse, and you are very lucky too."

"And why should not you have a ride also?" Raynald exclaimed. "Roxane can be saddled in ten minutes."

"Is Roxane here?" Eliane said, quite pleased at the idea of seeing again the pretty mare she had ridden in Paris.

"Yes; all the saddle-horses arrived yesterday. Put your habit on as quick as you can and we can scamper over the park and part o

the forest, and be home by nine o'clock. Do, now, go and get ready."

Eliane blushed and hesitated ; but Mademoiselle Silvestre, with an *apropos* which raised her immeasurably in Raynald's opinion, joined in the conversation and said :

"Blanche always rode with her brother at this hour, or a little later, perhaps ; but whether it was at eight or at nine does not much signify. Madame la Marquise liked her better to ride with M. Raynald at this time than later in the day."

"Why did she prefer it ?" Eliane asked.

"Oh, I suppose to avoid the heat of the sun, and also the remarks of the neighbours."

"Of the neighbours ?"

"Yes ; there was no chance of meeting anybody at this hour, and therefore no danger of ill-natured criticisms."

"But what could they have found to criticize in Blanche's riding with her brother ?"

"Well, it is not considered quite a proper thing for young ladies to do."

"You would never have guessed that, I am sure," Raynald said, in a sharp manner.

"You must, then, be told that there are people

—and not a few of them—in this neighbourhood who pay so bad a compliment to a man of my age as to suppose him incapable of taking sufficient care of his sister during a ride of two hours.”

“But then—” Eliane said.

“You are not my sister,” he said. “That makes all the difference.”

He could not help laughing, and she laughed too.

“What a capital reason !”

“Not a conclusive one, I admit; but seriously, I do think at this hour I may be permitted to escort you, even though you are nothing to me—at any rate, only my cousin.”

There was, however, a tone in his voice which sounded as if she was something to him, and Eliane felt it. She turned towards the house.

“Pray do what I ask you,” Raynald said beseechingly. “Come, Mademoiselle Silvestre, help me to convince my cousin that there is nothing objectionable in it.”

The old governess’s keen-sightedness and prudence were evidently at fault on this occasion. She never, indeed, made any use of

those qualities, even so far as she possessed them, when rightly or wrongly she fancied herself acting on a precedent established by Madame la Marquise ; so she answered :

“ Well, my dear Eliane, if you really have the least wish to take a ride before breakfast, I do not know why you should not do so. I am sure that Madame la Marquise would not object to your doing what her daughter did.”

Thus encouraged, Raynald would not listen to any further denial ; and Eliane, nothing loth, went to put on her riding-habit, whilst he ordered her horse. In twenty minutes' time they were galloping across the park.

The delight of riding, of feeling the morning air blowing in their faces, the beauty of the scenery, and the secret happiness which filled their hearts, kept them at first from speaking ; but after passing through the gate which led from the park into the forest, they slackened their pace, and entered on an alley thickly carpeted with moss. A hare or a rabbit now and then crossed their path ; the birds were singing joyfully in the tall trees over their heads. Then they began to converse.

"I have never seen the forest in such beauty. After the noise and bustle of Paris, there is something so peaceful and pleasant in the sight and smell of these woods."

"But I thought you liked Paris better than any other place, and that the country did not suit you. I think I have often heard you say so."

"Well, that was what I used to think, I did not like the country."

"I cannot understand that, especially now that I have seen Erlon."

"Well, I wonder at it myself; but there were reasons which, perhaps, accounted for it. My mother has always managed everything here, and with such success and ability that it would have required a great effort to acquire the same talent; a still greater one to take out of her hands the power which she has so long wielded with so much pleasure and such advantage to myself. So the years have gone by, and things remained just as they were when I was twenty years of age."

"And yet it is such a happy destiny—I cannot help thinking so—to live in a place like this, with every means to do good, with

important duties to perform, and entire independence. It furnishes a man with an unlimited scope for activity, and, at the same time, affords repose, which is always more or less necessary if the mind is to remain free."

"Yes ; I see all that now plainly enough. I quite agree with you ; but then—I was possessed with a feverish agitation and a love of excitement which the world promotes and fosters. It bored me to live here with my mother. I was always going backwards and forwards to Paris—"

"And what did you do in Paris ?"

This simple question rather embarrassed Raynald. He was considering whether he could answer it with perfect truthfulness, and meet without flinching the look of those most pure and most expressive eyes which were so innocently fixed upon him.

"What I did in Paris ?" he said at last.

"Well, Eliane, if you were to ask other people how I spent my time there, they would probably tell you that it was in a harmless manner enough. They would say that in the midst of a frivolous, idle, and vicious world I was reckoned to be less idle, less frivolous, and less

bad than others. Indeed, I think that I enjoyed a good reputation. But if you ask me what I now think myself of that life, the answer I can give you is, that after leading it for three years, one fine day I took a sudden resolution."

"That of leaving Paris and France?"

"Yes; to go away and seek elsewhere better objects for my natural activity, and safeguard against temptation. Armand was then returning from one of his long journeys. He saw that I was going astray, and with that power of persuasion he has, and the sort of authority he possesses over me, he carried his point and saved me. Poor Armand! he advised me to adopt, as a safeguard, the plan he had himself sought as a remedy. . ."

Eliane felt an interest in Malseigne, perhaps chiefly on account of his affection for Raynald, but also because she had seen in him evidences of high-mindedness, which convinced her that his friendship was an honour and a blessing for the young man on whom it was bestowed.

"A remedy!" she exclaimed; "and for what evil?"

"The evil of a love unworthy of him."

"Unworthy of him!" Eliane repeated, with a look of surprise.

Raynald seemed sorry for what he had said.

"It is wrong, perhaps, to speak of that incident in his life, of a wound which I hope and believe is now quite healed. But, anyhow, Armand acted towards me then—as he has often done before—the part of a guardian angel; but since my return it is no longer him. . . ."

Raynald stopped short; he felt that words of too great significance were rising to his lips, that he was about to say more than he intended. Fortunately they had just reached a place in the forest where four roads met, and they checked their horses in order to decide on the one they would take; Raynald hesitated an instant, and then said:

"We will follow the road to the left, which leads to one of the gates of the park, but first let us go on a little to the right amongst the underwood. . . It is those magnificent trees there which have given to this place its name. Now come on a little further and look at the view."

Eliane crossed the edge of the forest, and suddenly beheld an expanse of wood, and a river, which made her pull up her head and exclaim,

“How beautiful!”

It was the same scene she had admired from her window; but now, from the spot where she was standing, the chateau, seated on a woody eminence above the river, formed one of its leading features.

“What a perfect position,” she said, “and how well the chateau and its surroundings look from here! I could not form any idea of it last night.”

“Yes; it is a very fine house. My father rebuilt it, and he understood that sort of thing as well as any one; but what I wanted to show you is that castellated house on the other side of the river.”

Eliane’s eyes followed the direction he pointed out, and she saw a picturesque building on the banks of the Seine just opposite Erlon.

“That place is called Erlon du Gué. It stands exactly where the ferry used to be. When the river is low the country people

sometimes cross it in order to avoid going round by the bridge. But to come back to the house, it was let for thirty years running to a relative of our grandfather, whose name was the Baron de Seuil. He was a strange being, an invalid and a misanthrope, but, at the same time, a man of great taste, of immense information, and an antiquary. His passion was to collect curiosities and works of art, so that his cottage became a sort of little museum. Can you guess when I found that out?"

"Well, I think it must have been when you visited this aged relative."

"Not a bit of it; I never went near him. He absolutely would never see any of us. So you may imagine how surprised I was when I came back to France in the spring, to find that the Baron de Seuil was dead, and that he had bequeathed to me everything that the house contained."

"As the house itself is yours, it was natural, perhaps, that he should wish what was in it to remain there."

"Yes, if it had only been ordinary furniture, but not when it comes to all sorts of

precious things—a library filled with rare books and pictures of immense value. All I know is, that I have vowed eternal gratitude to the Baron de Seuil; and after examining all the treasures he had collected, I found how his tastes and mine so alike that I feel a posthumous affection for the old gentleman, and even so many regrets that during his lifetime I did not know him.”

“And when did you take possession of this charming legacy?”

“A very short time ago. Not having any idea of the pleasant surprise in store for me, I had been in no hurry to come down here and see it. Do you remember the day when I found you alone in the study?”

“Yes; I remember that day very well.”

Raynald paused a moment and then said,

“It was soon afterwards that for the first time I visited that house. It was just on such a fine day as this. You may fancy my surprise and delight when I found out all that it contained. I spent the day in examining all those treasures, and then, rather tired, sat down in the Baron’s sitting-room, in which were some of his most beautiful pictures and

favourite books. I fell asleep, I suppose with one of them in my hand. Anyhow, I dreamt, and a very charming dream it was—the sun, as it appeared to me, was shining into the room through stained-glass windows and filling it with golden light. It was as if the whole of my past life then passed before me; I felt conscious of a great change in myself. A new and great happiness, not unmixed with anguish, was oppressing my heart; I tried to express what I felt, but there was no one to speak to. Suddenly—as it seemed to me—you, Eliane, stood before me in the grey gown and black sash you used to wear at that time, and I told you that all that light, that happiness, that pain, the change I was conscious of in myself, were all owing to you.”

Eliane, whose eyes had been fixed on Raynald whilst he was speaking, turned them from him when he uttered those last words. She felt again as she had done the evening before—somewhat distressed; but her self-control and reserve—which, in spite of the independence and even boldness she sometimes evinced, were predominating features in her

character—stood her in good stead, and though there was something a little tremulous in her voice, she answered with calmness :

“Well, if we leave out its poetical accompaniments, this dream of yours may easily be realized, for you may be sure that what you have told me of that wonderful house gives me a great curiosity to see it.”

The gentleness and somewhat prosaic manner in which this was said enabled Raynald to recover himself. He had all but betrayed his feelings, and now remembered his resolutions. It was almost a relief to think that Eliane had not understood him, and he promised her, with some little embarrassment and agitation, to take her as soon as possible to see the little Castel du Gué.

It was getting late, and they turned homeward. When he helped his cousin to dismount at the door of the chateau, Raynald really believed that he had strictly kept his promise to his friend and the resolutions he had made that very morning.

CHAPTER IX.

MADAME DE LIMINGE was sitting in her dressing-gown reading her letters when Eliane came into her room. She had taken off her riding-habit and put on a white gown, which heightened the effect of her brilliant complexion. The Marquise remarked it, and said :

"You have very blooming cheeks this morning, my love. The country agrees with you."

"Oh yes, I am sure it does. And now I have just been breathing the air of the forest."

"You have been in the forest this morning?"

"Yes, with Raynald. He took me a beautiful ride on horseback."

The feeling that prompted these words was somewhat akin to that which in her childhood

led her to confess at once her little faults. She had tried to persuade herself to the contrary, but the ride had been too pleasant not to leave her a little doubtful as to its perfect propriety. At any rate she was anxious without any delay to make a clean breast of it. She was very much relieved when the Marquise, as she went on opening her letters, said :

“ You did very well, and I am glad Raynald was up early enough to escort you.”

She then returned again to her letters, and having read them all, drew towards her a little table and began to write without attending any further to her niece, who was going away, when Madame de Liminge looked up and said in an absent manner,

“ I beg your pardon, my dear ; I forgot you were there. I am expecting a great deal of company next week. The Duc and Duchesse de Longvilliers, Malseigne, of course, Horace de Tréval, and there are several neighbours whom I must write to. . . . I have a great deal to do.”

“ Can I be of any use to you ? ”

“ No, thank you. Oh yes, by the way,

Will you tell Mademoiselle Silvestre that I want to speak to her ?” Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, “No, no ; I shall see her later. First I must . . . You can go now, my dear child, I shall not want anything, Spend the morning in any way you like. We breakfast at twelve ; I shall be very busy till then.”

Eliane left the room and was going up the oak stair-case, when she saw Raynald crossing the hall. He hurried towards her and leant against the banister at the foot of the stairs. She stopped and he asked,

“Is my mother in her room ?”

“Yes, but she is very busy. She expects company next week.”

“Do you know who are coming ?”

“The Duc and Duchesse de Longvilliers, and a good many others.”

“The devil take them.”

Eliane smiled.

“In spite of that inhospitable wish, I am sure that you will do the honours of the chateau in the most polite manner.”

“I wish nobody was coming ; we are very well as we are.”

Eliane did not answer, and slowly went up the stairs ; Raynald followed her with his eyes till her white gown disappeared at the top of the landing-place. Then he went and knocked at his mother's door.

“ You are come at the right moment,” she exclaimed ; “ I was just going to send for you ; I particularly want to speak to you, Raynald.”

“ And I have also something important to say,” he answered, “ or I should not have disturbed you so early.”

The Marquise was struck with the tone of his voice. She looked at him very earnestly. She did not often trouble herself, as we have said already, to read the thoughts of others. This was not from any want of penetration, but rather because of her tendency to force upon them her own ideas. When she chose to pay attention to any one's countenance, or rather, when some strong interest reminded her to do so, she was very well able to make out its expression. There was something in Raynald's face which made her anxious.

Though he had always been very affectionate and respectful towards her, he had not—

Like his sister—blindly followed her leading. There was much tenderness, but also some violence, in his character. He was very apt to indulge in romantic dreams which his mother considered an infirmity, and on certain occasions he had shown himself impetuous and imprudent. She never felt quite sure that he would not surprise her any day by some strong fancy or sudden act, and this often made her uneasy.

There was a smile on his face, but he looked pale and agitated. What was he going to say to her? Should she be the first to speak? Should she tell him at once what was in her mind? A moment's reflection convinced her that it would be better to let him open the conversation, and, as it were, to watch his approach.

Raynald was half-sitting, half-kneeling, on a chair near his mother. He took her hand and kissed it. His heart was beating fast, and he wanted to speak calmly.

“What is the matter? What can you have to say to me of such importance?”

There was something caressing and fond in the Marquise's manner.

"Yes, mother, what I have to say is very important, for the happiness of my whole life turns upon it. But do not be afraid; it is nothing sad or terrible."

"But what is it? Do not keep me in suspense, Raynald."

"Well, it is this. I am twenty-six years old; I am tired of the restless and idle life I lead; I think Erlon a charming place, and I want to live here. In short, I wish to marry."

The Marquise, much relieved, laughed and said,

"Is that all, my dear child. Why, it is the very thing I wish also. How could you hesitate to say what I have been longing for so much?"

Raynald again kissed his mother's hand.

"Thank you, thank you, dearest mother. You then agree to it. I knew you would, for you already look upon the dear girl I love, and have chosen for my wife, as your daughter."

The Marquise started, and snatched her hand from her son's grasp.

"Whom you *love*! whom you have *chosen*!

and without consulting your mother! But who are you speaking of?"

A strange but not impossible conjecture suggested itself to her mind, resulting, perhaps, from the settled conviction that her own judgment being infallible, others must needs even instinctively conform to it. Her son had seen the beautiful Constance de Longvilliers on the evening before his sister's marriage. Again on the day of the wedding he had talked to her a long time. Was he, perhaps, alluding to her . . . ?

But this dream lasted only a minute. Raynald pronounced another name, and whilst his mother was exclaiming "Eliane!" with an amazement which baffles all description, he poured forth the feelings he could no longer suppress.

"Yes, my dear mother, 'Eliane.' Do you know any one more beautiful, more distinguished, more charming—worthier, in every way, to be your daughter? You said so yourself yesterday. . . . You have told me, over and over again, that you considered her residence under your roof as a blessing from heaven. She is Blanche's greatest friend.

She is the very woman whom I used to picture to myself in those youthful dreams which you used to call fanciful romances, but which in her I find entirely realized."

The Marquise looked aghast. If the chateau of Erlon les Bois had fallen down suddenly on her head the shock would not have been greater. She saw rising before her a formidable obstacle to the accomplishment of one of those projects which, when once fixed in her mind, assumed the form of a law to which everything must bend. She firmly believed, and in many instances was right in the belief, that on the subjects which she had at heart her judgment was the best that could be formed; and, with regard to her children, she would have thought it a dereliction of duty to give way to theirs.

In the course of a second her affection for Eliane changed almost into aversion; and the satisfaction she had felt in acting kindly towards her into remorse. Her son was guilty in her eyes of culpable folly; and these thoughts and feelings were rising so tumultuously in her heart, that she was on the point of giving vent to her anger and

estranging him altogether by a torrent of harsh and violent reproaches.

But though quick in temper, the Marquise was not passionate. On the contrary, she had a singular power of self-command, great prudence, and extraordinary ability, when she chose to exert it. To this it may be added, that she was totally incapable of understanding the reality or the depth of Raynald's feelings. Never having known herself, or in others, anything bordering on passionate affection, she looked upon all manifestations of the sort with sovereign contempt. A fancy so utterly in opposition to his mother's wishes could only be a momentary caprice. There would be no difficulty in getting the better of such a childish whim. She determined, in the meanwhile, not to treat the matter too seriously, and without a moment's hesitation planned her course.

"My dear Raynald," she said, with apparent calmness, whilst her son's eyes were fixed upon her with intense anxiety, "you can easily imagine that what you have just told me never, of course, crossed my mind. Eliane is, no doubt, a charming girl, and, as you said

just now, I love her as a daughter. But had she been your sister I really would not have looked upon your marrying her as hard more utterly out of the question."

"Out of the question!" Raynald exclaimed

"She is your first cousin, a sort of marriage which your father could not bear, at which I never would consent to in the case of my children. Then, though she has some little fortune, there is such an utter disproportion between her position and yours. . . ."

Raynald made an impatient gesture, and rose from his half-kneeling attitude, and in a tone the bitterness of which he vainly tried to conceal, he said—

"Well, but granting the existence of these obstacles, do you not take into account what I have told you of my attachment to Eliane?"

He was standing before his mother, clenching the table with so trembling a hand that everything upon it shook. His eyes were bent down, and his face very pale.

The Marquise, now in her turn much agitated, stood up, and placing her hand

her son's shoulder, she obliged him to look at her, and said,—

“And are *you* not utterly regardless of my approbation, my wishes, my advice? Have I been so bad a mother to you that, with regard to the most important act of your life, you seem to lose all consideration for me; so much so that, perhaps, a *respectful notice** is all that you consider necessary, and my consent quite superfluous!”

“Your words, mother, are cruel,” Raynald answered; “and I cannot think that you mean what you say. You know very well that my love and my respect for you can never change, and that even if my heart should break, I will not do anything against your will.”

The Marquise took silent heed of this promise, and felt softened and reassured. She had no fears as to her son breaking his heart. This was, in her opinion, an incident only heard of in novels, and quite out of the sphere of real life. She felt it to be her duty to resume

* In France, when persons are of age and make up their minds to marry without the consent of their parents, it is customary to inform the latter of such an intention by what is called “*une sommation respectueuse*.”

the direction of Raynald's fate, and wisely to guide his course. In a year's time he would consider himself the happiest of men, and thank her for it.

After a moment's thought she looked hard into his face and said,—

“Raynald, I wish to know whether you have spoken to your cousin of your intentions? Is she aware that you were going to disclose them to me?”

Raynald's cheeks reddened at this question, not with embarrassment, but with displeasure.

“No, mother, I have not announced what you call *my intentions* to Eliane. She is quite ignorant as yet of the honour I propose to confer on her; I am, therefore, equally ignorant of what would be her answer to my proposal.”

It did not suit the Marquise to appear offended at the ironical manner in which this was said. Things were not as desperate as she might have feared. To gain time was the great point. Raynald's countenance was growing darker and darker. She thought it necessary to soothe him a little, and, with that

mixture of authority and gentleness which gave her a marvellous influence over those she wanted to subdue, Madame de Liminge said,—

“I think I have said enough, my dear Raynald, to make you pause and reflect. I have nothing to add but that—certain as I am of desiring nothing but your happiness—I shall never change my own mind on this point. But there is no harm, is there, in delay? You tell me, and I fully believe it, that you do not intend to act against my wishes. You also tell me that Eliane knows nothing of your feelings; therefore, you are bound in honour not to enlighten her on the subject. I am sure you think so too. Let us leave the matter alone for the present; we shall talk over it again later on. I have a great deal on my hands this week, and I reckon upon your helping me to make their visits pleasant to our friends; for, after all, you are the master of the house.”

It was rather a singular moment to remind him of this fact, but he did not notice it. He was well aware that his mother was never inclined towards what she did not originate

herself, and he was prepared to expect that she would offer at-first a determined opposition to his wishes, whether or not, in the end, she was brought round to give way to them. Deceived by his hopes and her calm manner, he began to think that her opposition would not be, after all, very violent. Under this impression he made up his mind willingly enough to maintain, at any rate for a few days, the silence he had hitherto observed, and to devote himself during that time to the entertainment of her guests.

He was going away, somewhat relieved by the last part of their conversation, when his mother detained him by saying—

“You understand, I suppose, that it will be proper to abstain for the present from early rides in the forest such as you took this morning?”

Raynald made no answer, but a strong feeling of irritation impelled him to slam the door when he went out.

Madame de Liminge, who was again sinking into anxious meditation, raised her head ; a deep colour suffused her face, and a tear stole down her cheek.

h, how ungrateful children can be," she
o herself; and then wrote the following
am addressed to M. de Malseigne: "Come
n as possible; I want you."

CHAPTER X.

MALSEIGNE did not receive that telegram as soon as Madame de Liminge hoped. He also had left Paris on the day of Blanche's marriage, and had gone to a small country place of his in Bourgogne. It was only on his return from it that he found amongst his letters the Marquise's telegram. He immediately started for Erlon les Bois. By the time he arrived there the society he was invited to meet had been several days at the chateau.

It was past nine o'clock when he entered the drawing-room, which was brilliantly lighted up and full of company, a great many of the neighbours having been asked that evening. M. Malseigne's appearance was not noticed at first by any one but the Marquise, who hastily left the sofa where she was sitting with thé Duchesse de Longvilliers and went up to him.

"Here you are at last," she said ; "I have been expecting you every day. Why did not you write ? Why do you arrive so late ?"

After Malseigne had briefly explained his non-appearance, she added in a low voice :

"I want to speak to you as soon as possible, Armand. Remain here in this room till everybody has gone ; I have been very anxious I assure you. Now I am a little less so ; but still—I shall tell you all about it later."

And then Madame de Liminge went back to her company, whilst Malseigne, much more able than she supposed to divine the reason of her uneasiness, looked on at the gay scene, seeking to discover amongst the crowd the only beings he cared about in that society.

The Duchesse de Longvilliers was on the large canopy with the Baroness de Crécy, and two or three other ladies near them, one of whom was as conspicuous for the style of her dress as for the vivacity of her manner.

Madame de l'Héris was a young widow, looked upon by her neighbours as a remarkably distinguished and charming person, which might really have been the case if the little

town of C—, where they lived, had been distant enough from Paris to prevent her importing, not only her toilettes, but the whole tone of her ideas and conversation from what she supposed to be Parisian society. This had deprived this provincial *élégante* of what might have been genuine and tolerably agreeable in her without imparting anything desirable in its stead. As it was, she was rather tiresome, especially to those she particularly wished to dazzle:

That evening, however, her animated chatter had succeeded in gathering around her for a few moments the young master of the house, the Duc de Longvilliers, M. de Tréval, and some other young men. But soon Raynald and his friend Horace withdrew to another part of the salon, and others followed them. The Duc devoted himself to the Baronne de Fougères, who had a country house in that neighbourhood, and whom he had sometimes met in Paris, so that Madame de l'Héris would have been altogether deserted had it not been for two habitual admirers, who looked upon her as the beau idéal of a woman of the world. One was M. Deshaies, whose

fondest dream it was to live in Parisian society—a bliss hitherto denied him. The other was a young man of letters, who had chosen her for his muse, and benefited by the inspirations she periodically derived from her visits to what she and M. Oswald Huvilliers were wont to style the focus of French intellect.

But just then these faithful swains were rather at a discount. Raynald's striking beauty and aristocratic appearance, and M. de Tréval's graceful *laissez aller*, had thrown into the shade the attractions of Madame de l'Héris' provincial admirers. She soon left them in the lurch, and went to the pianoforte, around which were grouped Mademoiselle de Longvilliers, Eliane, and Madame Fougères's two daughters.

After many solicitations, Mademoiselle de Longvilliers had at last consented to sit down before the instrument, and was beginning to run, in a masterly manner, her hands over the keys so as to attract attention and command silence. Then, after a brilliant prelude, she played one of Chopin's pieces with an amount of talent and execution formerly only

known amongst artistes, but which many girls and women now possess.

Eliane, who was standing behind her, dressed very simply, and looking somewhat pale, listened in the most attentive manner to this brilliant performance, and expressed her admiration in so true and heartfelt a manner, that the beautiful Constance was more flattered by her evident delight and pleasure than by the applause of the rest of the company.

In spite of their praises and supplications, she was just about to leave the pianoforte, when Eliane laid her hand on hers, and said,

“ Oh, do play again ! I feel as if I was hearing, for the first time, real music.”

Constance was surprised and pleased. She had never herself gone into raptures over the playing of any of her friends, and Eliane's unquestionable admiration of her talent was quite a new gratification, and one which agreeably tickled her vanity. She smiled, and sitting down again, played one of those songs without words, the mysterious language of which is often more eloquent than the most

touching poetry. Anguish and joy, hope and fear, every passion and emotion of the soul, is in turn expressed by accents which move the deepest chords of the human heart.

Eliane's eyes filled with tears, and though a simple "Thank you" was all she could find to say when the thrilling strains came to an end, the tone in which she uttered these two words flattered, in a very sensible manner, the ear of one who was used to receive praise and to judge of its value.

Till that moment Mademoiselle de Longvilliers had treated Eliane with a cold superciliousness, which the latter had met by an equal but different sort of reserve. Now her mood suddenly changed. She was used to shine alone, or, at least, to eclipse without trouble all other girls, and she had instinctively felt that the attention paid to her since her arrival at Erlon had not been quite so exclusive as usual. M. de Tréval had twice been guilty of absence whilst she was speaking to him, and in Raynald's studied politeness she had missed the kind of homage she expected from him.

Although her grandmother had not said a

word of the tacit understanding which existed between herself and Madame de Liminge, Constance easily guessed that the present visit was one of those meetings which precede decisive interviews, and enable parents to say "that the young people have long known and been attached to each other."

Raynald's manner was not, however, quite in accordance with such a position of things. This preoccupied the young heiress, and somewhat ruffled her temper. But for a moment this was forgotten. . . . Eliane's admiration for her playing had broken down the barrier between them, and Constance de Longvilliers became suddenly as gracious to Mademoiselle de Liminge as she had hitherto been the contrary.

"You are very fond of music I see."

"Oh yes, very fond indeed."

"Do you play yourself?"

"I can sing a little, and I play on the pianoforte just enough to accompany myself."

"You sing, do you? Oh, then, let us sing a duet together. What do you know?"

"Hymns and chants, and Scotch and English ballads."

"English music! I never heard of anything so dreadful. Do you not know anything Italian or German?"

She was rapidly turning over the contents of a portfolio, and Eliane looking over her shoulder.

"I have sung that," she said, pointing to a piece of music. "The words are French and the music German."

"That duet of Mendelssohn's? That will do beautifully. It is one of those I like best. What kind of a voice have you got?"

Eliane hesitated.

"Is it a soprano, or a contralto, or a mezzo soprano?"

"I do not exactly know."

"Well, never mind, sing a second to my soprano; I always sing the first part."

Mademoiselle de Longvilliers seated herself again at the pianoforte. Her voice was an indifferent one; but she had considerable skill in managing it, and art, as regards singing, often supplies the place of nature. At any rate she thought so herself, and had no fears of being eclipsed by Eliane, whose inexperience was evident. Without more ado

the latter stood up, as free from false shame as from vanity. In her simple white dress, and with no other ornament than the medalion she always wore round her neck, Eliane did not appear to disadvantage by the side of her beautiful companion, who was magnificently and becomingly arrayed.

They made a very charming picture, which drew the attention of every one in the room. Private conversation ceased; the gentlemen all gathered round the pianoforte. M. de Tréval took up a position as near as possible to Eliane; Raynald stood at some distance, partly concealed by the folds of a curtain, and just opposite to the singers. Malseigne did not say a word, but placed himself by his side.

Mademoiselle de Longvilliers played the prelude, and sang first. Then Eliane began her part. On hearing the first notes of her pure and sweet voice Constance looked surprised, and when she had sung some bars, murmured "Bravo!"

As soon as the duet was ended, Mademoiselle de Longvilliers, whose artistic impulse at that moment prevailed over every

other feeling, spontaneously, and with real enthusiasm, sprang up and kissed Eliane. The two girls from that moment felt quite at their ease together.

Eliane's admiration for her new friend, which had not been up to that moment very enthusiastic, was changing into a much more kindly feeling ; and as to Mademoiselle de Longvilliers' manner, it was no longer ungracious or haughty, but, on the contrary, quite intimate in its tone.

"You have a lovely voice," she exclaimed. "It would be a positive sin not to cultivate it. I am bent upon hearing you sing in Italian."

"But I do not know Italian."

"Never mind, I shall teach it you. You have so good an ear that you will learn to pronounce it in no time. I pique myself on having the rare merit of a good pronunciation, in singing at least, for, to say the truth, I should be puzzled to speak two words of Italian without an accompaniment. It is all settled then. To-morrow I give you a first lesson ?"

"By all means ; I shall be delighted," Eliane

replied. "But now, do play something more."

Constance did not refuse. She was in high spirits, and satisfied with the effect she had produced. Against her usual practice, she played one piece after another when asked to do so, without waiting to be pressed, from time to time glancing at the listeners to find out which of them paid most attention. Raynald's expression of countenance she could not well make out, as he was at some distance from the pianoforte, but she was struck with his motionless attitude. He appeared rivetted to the spot where he was standing, and she justly thought that there was something in his demeanour which indicated emotion kept under strong control.

Had she been able to observe him more narrowly, she would not have been so well pleased, for then she must have perceived that his eyes, which she supposed to be fixed on herself, were looking further on, and watching with extreme attention M. de Tréval's movements, who, after Eliane had withdrawn behind the pianoforte, had also left the place he had previously occupied, and was

now leaning on the back of her chair and speaking to her in a whisper. What could he be saying to her . . . ?

At first Eliane did not appear to be listening to him. She was bending forward, apparently attending only to Constance's playing. But Raynald saw her suddenly raise her head, and perceived that she was colouring. Her handsome side-face indicated surprise, and she said something. He would have given worlds to have found out what, and was on the point of stepping forward beyond the shade of the curtain which screened him from observation, when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Malseigne whispered to him.

"Take care what you are about."

"You here!" he exclaimed. "How you startled me, Armand; but I am very glad to see you. I have much to say to you."

"So I thought. When can we talk quietly?"

"Whenever you like. This evening?"

"This evening I have another appointment; your mother wishes to see me here when all these people are gone."

"In that case I must speak to you at once. Come with me into the garden; the heat is dreadful in this room."

He would have found it more difficult, perhaps, to leave his post of observation if Eliane and M. de Tréval had still been in the same place; but she had moved, and for an instant he had lost sight of her. The piano stood before the open doors of a library less brilliantly lighted than the salon. She had gone round that way, and was now seated at the other side of Constance, who was still playing. M. de Tréval had disappeared into the recesses of the said library.

The two friends were soon walking in the broad alley between the house and the lawn. It was a beautiful night, the moon shining brightly.

Raynald instantly began to pour forth his feelings in a vehement, passionate, and bitter manner. Armand listened to this outburst without surprise, but with grave anxiety.

"I was certain," he said, "that your mother would refuse her consent. I knew it; I told you it would be so. Poor Eliane!"

"It is I who am to be pitied, I alone . . ."

Malseigne looked surprised.

"Nothing has disturbed her peace of heart. You will be convinced of it if you watch her. She cares for no one at least, I hope so. But since yesterday I have been dreadfully anxious. It is quite evident to me that Tréval is thinking of her. Strange enough it is that so cold and calculating a man should deviate from the general custom, and not seek to duplicate his wealth. But such is the case. My mother sees it, and encourages him. She answers in that way the avowal I have made to her. . . . And to turn away my thoughts, I suppose, from Eliane, she obliges me to make the civil from morning to night to the people she has invited here without even consulting me about it. But I am losing all patience. This sort of thing cannot last for ever; I love Eliane, and if I lose her I am undone."

Armand listened in silence, and after a pause said:

"And Mademoiselle de Longvilliers?"

"Mademoiselle de Longvilliers! What has she to do with what I am telling you? She is a handsome girl, rather capricious, and to

my mind very common-place. I never saw any one who interested me less."

Malseigne was very much astonished at this answer. He did not understand why the Marquise had said nothing of her wishes to her son, and still less that he had not guessed them. He knew, however, that Raynald was in one respect like his mother, that is, apt to be exclusively engrossed by his own thoughts, though his generous and affectionate disposition prevented him from being selfish.

In this, as in many other ways, Armand's character was superior to his friend's. He possessed the rare merit of complete self-forgetfulness—a higher quality than even the power of self-sacrifice.

He was hesitating as to what he should say to Raynald, when a noise of steps and laughter was heard. The windows of the salon on the other side of the garden were thrown open, and almost all the society rushing into the alley, interrupted their conversation. Only two or three elderly individuals afraid of the night-air remained behind, the *Duchesse de Longvilliers* amongst the number,

Her voice was heard addressing useless supplications to her granddaughter.

“Constance! how foolish you are! You will catch your death of cold going out of this room into the open air. Come back immediately, at any rate to put on this cloak.”

But Constance was already beyond reach of these remonstrances. Eliane had followed her, but she heard the Duchesse’s appeal, and returned to take charge of the white cashmere cloak she wanted Constance to put on. The Marquise detained her niece a moment in order to throw over her shoulders a black lace shawl she was wearing herself.

This short delay made Eliane lose sight of those she wanted to overtake. Constance had declared that she meant to go as far as the river-side, and Raynald, whether he liked it or not, was obliged to lead the whole company there by the shortest way: this was down an avenue of trees to the left of the broad alley. So that when Eliane came out of the house, though the moon was shining very brightly, she saw no one, and stood still a moment hesitating which road to take. Somebody, however, appeared in a minute, and she

concluded that it must be one of the party which had followed Constance, and that this individual, whoever he might be, had turned back to fetch her.

Under this impression she went forward to meet him, but when she saw who it was she stopped short, and turning round, walked rapidly back to the house. She was just about to re-enter the drawing-room, without having had time to think how she should account for her re-appearance, when she heard some one who was standing in the shade of the wall, and whom she had passed without observing him, say,

“Eliane! are you alone? I thought you had gone with that merry party.”

“M. de Malseigne!” she exclaimed, in a tone of pleasure and relief which rather astonished him. “Oh, do give me your arm, and let us join them.”

Without waiting for an answer she took his arm and drew him towards the avenue.

After they had walked a little way Horace de Tréval met them. He looked at first surprised and vexed, but recognizing Malseigne, recovered himself and shook hands with him.

"I was afraid, Mademoiselle, you had remained behind, and came to look for you ; the alley beyond the avenue is very dark, and the path leading to the river extremely slippery."

"Thank you," Eliane said, rather coldly, and she pressed her arm against Malseigne's to make him walk faster.

"I did not know you were here," Horace said to Armand. "When did you arrive?"

"Only about an hour ago."

They went on, and M. de Tréval walked by the side of Eliane without speaking to her. They crossed the pleached alley, and then descended into the path, which was really rather dangerous on account of the flickering light which sometimes shone upon it, and at other moments left them in total darkness.

Eliane walked so fast that, had it not been for Malseigne's arm, she would often have stumbled. . . . At last they reached a large tree by the side of the river, around which were several seats. There was a pretty view from that spot, and the inhabitants of the chateau were fond of sitting on those benches.

There they found Constance and all those

who had accompanied or followed her. Eliane placed on her shoulders the cloak she had been entrusted with. Constance only nodded in return. She was speaking with great animation to Raynald, and did not interrupt her conversation.

"Three saddle-horses, did you say? Three horses that women can ride? That is as many as we want. Then why should not we have an early ride to-morrow, M. de Liminge, before it gets dreadfully hot. I should like it of all things, and grandmamma will not object, for I am sure Madame de l'Héris will be quite pleased to act as chaperon."

Madame de l'Héris enthusiastically assented.

"And Mademoiselle Flore or Mademoiselle Hermione de Fougères will perhaps join our party," Constance said.

"They neither of them ride," Madame de Fougères answered very coldly.

Her daughters had been carried off without her sanction, and with some difficulty she had followed them. But it was cold under the trees, and she considered this nocturnal ramble both disagreeable and out of place. Her temper, moreover, was ruffled. The demoiselles

de Fougères were reckoned beauties, and no one had seemed to notice them that evening.

"If you want a practised horse-woman," she added, in rather a sour manner, "here is Mademoiselle de Liminge, who beats, I have been told, the most celebrated Amazons."

She had not intended to praise Eliane, but her words called forth a delighted exclamation from Constance.

"You don't say so! You have every possible talent, I see," she said, turning to Eliane. "Then it will all d^o beautifully. We shall be three ladies, and one of them a married woman. Grandpapa also likes a ride; a short one does not tire him. He has been my riding-master. . . . It is all settled then. I shall ask him to come with us, and I know he will, and then grandmamma can say nothing against it. Now we had better go home, or she will be so cross. And to-morrow morning, M. de Liminge, we shall ride, shan't we, to that place out there?" and she pointed to the little chateau of Erlon du Gué, which looked well in the moonlight, rising as it did from a dark mass of foliage, beneath which the river wound like a silver ribbon.

Raynald murmured some sort of assent, but he was not thinking of Constance; his eyes were fixed on Eliane's pale face. With her head leaning against the trunk of the old tree, and covered nearly from head to foot by the black lace shawl his mother had lent her, she resembled one of those apparitions in German legends, beautiful beyond earthly beauty, but betokening sorrow.

Her eyes were fixed on the opposite side of the river; so were Raynald's. Both of them had the same thought in their minds. Both were thinking of that happy ride which had never been repeated, and of the plan they had then made of visiting alone together the little Chateau du Gué.

Since that day all had seemed changed. It was with a kind of surprise and vague regret that she felt it; Raynald with intense grief. They were living under the same roof, but they were already, to all intents and purposes, separated. She could not account for this. We know well the reason why, and she would soon have known it too had it been possible at that moment for Raynald to allow

her to read in his full heart all he was pledged to conceal.

But both had to command their feelings and resume the outward manner which circumstances forced upon them.

Everybody was moving, and Raynald, of course, obliged to offer his arm to Mademoiselle de Longvilliers; Madame de l'Héris and her escort followed. Malseigne was just going up to Eliane, whom he had not lost sight of, in order to protect her, as before, from unwelcome attentions. But he was arrested in his progress by a heavy arm which seized hold of his own. He was in Madame de Fougères grasp.

"I implore you, M. de Malseigne," she exclaimed. "Help me up that dreadful hill; I shall never be able to get on alone."

She made a sign for her daughters to precede her, and leant with all her might on Malseigne, who was thus forced to drag her up the steep ascent.

Eliane, thus left behind, walked alone, but M. de Tréval immediately joined her.

"Take my arm, Mademoiselle," he said in a beseeching manner.

"Thank you," she coldly answered ; " I get on very well alone ; I am sure-footed and used to bad roads."

And she did walk firmly and straight up the slippery path.

But at the top of the hill he came again alongside of her, without this time offering his arm.

"As I am for an instant alone with you, Mademoiselle Eliane," he said, "allow me to seize this opportunity, and to beg your pardon."

"I really have nothing to forgive," she answered. "You did not, I suppose, intend to offend me ; but if you wish not to do so, you will never again speak to me as you did this morning, and just now again in the drawing-room. Now let us say nothing more about it, and be good friends."

"No, I must excuse myself, I must tell you why I ventured to say what I did. I know that I ought to have restrained the expression of all that your beauty, your . . ."

"M. de Tréval," Eliane impatiently exclaimed, "it is really inconceivable that you should go on in this way after what I have said just now."

"Only let me finish what I was going to tell you. I knew that you had been educated in England, and this led me to suppose that you would not be surprised, and that I might venture to address to you a proposal which, according to French custom, ought to have been first addressed to your aunt."

Horace de Tréval felt convinced at the bottom of his heart that this explanation could not fail to satisfy the young lady to whom it was given. If it had not been too dark for him to see Eliane's face, he would have been obliged to give up that belief. She began by walking faster so as to diminish the distance between herself and those who were in front of her, and then she said very coldly :

"You were entirely mistaken. I have not been brought up in France, but I am French ; and I am quite unacquainted with the customs of other countries."

Unfortunately, what had been meant to check all further advances on the part of M. de Tréval conveyed to his mind an entirely different idea. Horace did not and could not believe that she meant to refuse him, so that after a moment's reflection, he came to the

conclusion that what she objected to was the mode of his addresses, not at all their purport.

The young people entered somewhat noisily into the drawing-room on their return from their expedition. Constance immediately set to work, first to enlist her grandfather on her side with regard to the projected ride, then to obtain the Duchesse de Longvilliers's consent to it, and finally Madame de Liminge's approval.

The Marquise was rather surprised, but, on the whole, by no means displeased with a scheme her son apparently encouraged, and which would necessitate his talking a great deal to Mademoiselle de Longvilliers. She was all the more inclined for it when Eliane, in spite of all Constance's entreaties, asked and obtained leave not to be of the party. It was accordingly arranged that the Duc de Longvilliers should escort his granddaughter. The rest of the cavalcade was to comprise Madame de l'Héris, Raynald, the Comte de Tréval, and M. Edgar Deshaies, who had hastened to announce his intention of joining the party.

Madame de Fougères and her daughters then took leave of the Marquise, and left the chateau, somewhat less satisfied than usual

with their visit. Madame de l'Héris, on the contrary, drove off in her little victoria in the highest spirits, the white feathers of her hat fluttering in the night breeze. Her last words were a promise to arrive, without fail, the next day at the appointed hour.

It was so late after their departure that the Marquise withdrew very tired to her room, and sent word to Malseigne that she would see him in the morning during the time of the riding expedition, which he also had declined to take part in.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the morrow the weather was as beautiful as ever. For some time past, each morning had ushered in a glorious sunshiny day, and every evening sunk in the west with many a fiery or rosy cloud, presaging a continuance of bright skies and soft breezes. It almost seemed, when this happens, as if sunshine was insured to us. We almost forget the existence of storms, and rely on fair appearances, as if no change was at hand. We like to forget the fickleness of Northern climes, for the thought of it would disturb the full enjoyment of the present, and these poor hearts of ours are so bent on enjoyment, so covetous of happiness, and who can blame them for it?—only too often they mistake the end and the means.

Eliane was standing at her window looking at the riding party on their way to the forest—Constance, in her simple dark riding-habit,

was more beautiful even than usual. Raynald was on one side of her, and on the other the Duc de Longvilliers, whose military carriage made him appear less aged than he really was. Like some other Royalists, he had made the great campaigns of the empire and preserved a martial carriage, which combined advantageously with the manners of the old French society, whose traditions he faithfully adhered to.

Madame de l'Héris, dressed with more questionable taste than her companion, rode behind her, escorted by M. Edgar Deshaies, and M. de Tréval closed the march.

This was what Eliane had foreseen when she refused to join the party, and her prevision was justified. Raynald, in any case, must have devoted himself to Mademoiselle de Longvilliers, and M. de Tréval would have been her own companion during the whole of the ride.

"I was quite right to stay at home," she thought to herself, and left the window without any conscious regret, but yet with a sigh.

She took a book and went down-stairs. On her way to the garden she passed through the

hall. The letters had just arrived and were lying on the table. Eliane eagerly took possession of one addressed to herself, for she recognized Blanche's hand-writing. It was the first time her cousin had written to her since her marriage. The Marquise heard every day from her daughter, who, after spending two or three days at Crécy, had gone with her husband to Italy on a wedding-tour, which was not yet ended. But the bride had not found time to write to her dear Eliane the long letter which she daily announced. It had arrived at last, and Eliane took it with her into the garden. She meant to sit on a favourite bench of hers at the end of the broad alley, where she was in the habit of establishing herself with her work and her books.

To get to that seat she had to pass in front of the chateau; and as she came near the open window of her aunt's room on the ground floor, she heard her speaking loud and eagerly, and also discerned M. de Malseigne's voice answering her not quite in his usual calm and collected manner. The conversation was evidently important and animated. Eliane crossed, as far as she could, to the other side

of the alley ; but before she could get beyond hearing M. de Malseigne exclaimed,

“Not another word, Madame,” and then a profound silence ensued.

She glanced at the inside of the room, and saw the Marquise sitting in her arm-chair with her back to the window and her hand on the table, and Malseigne standing before her with such an agitated countenance that he hardly looked like himself. Eliane was startled and affected by the glimpse she had of his face, and trembled so much when she got to the bench that it was with difficulty she opened Blanche's letter.

What could be the matter ? what could thus have disturbed to such a degree as calm and dispassionate a man as Armand ? She had some trouble to divert her thoughts from this subject and to fix them on the letter in her hand.

We will leave her a while thus occupied, and in the mean time revert to the conversation in the Marquise's room, taking it up at the moment when Eliane heard M. de Malseigne's vehement exclamation.

After a long silence Madame de Liminge said,

"I am surprised, and I must say grieve Armand, that you, whom I look upon as a son or, at any rate, as Raynald's elder brother, should compel me to measure my words in speaking to you. Am I not to be allowed to say what I think?"

"No, no . . ." Armand answered in a muffled voice; "it is not that. For mercy's sake, Madame . . ."

He did not finish his sentence, but falling down on a chair, leant on the table, his head on his hands, and for an instant did not speak; then in a quieter manner he said,

"Forgive me. You are right and I am wrong. Say what you choose."

He passed his hand over his forehead as if to obliterate the traces of his recent emotion.

"You not only grieve me," the Marquise answered, in a very earnest tone, "but for the first time since we have been friends I cannot understand you. . . . You say the most extraordinary and unreasonable things, and when I make what seems to me a very natural reply, you command me to be silent, and then, as a favour, you give me leave to speak. Do tell me what all this means."

Armand, without directly answering her question, replied,

“Was there anything very astonishing in my saying that Eliane is charming, that Raynald is desperately in love with her, and that this marriage, which would make them perfectly happy, ought also to please you?”

“And I,” the Marquise said, in a voice which was never harsh, but that sometimes became as cold and sharp as a steel blade, “I ask you if it was so surprising that I should have reminded you that ten years ago you thought yourself desperately in love with a handsome girl whom her mother would not allow you to marry? What has since happened proves that this was a great blessing for you. It saved you from sorrow and shame.”

Armand writhed as if she had touched a wound in his heart; but though he looked deadly pale, his self-control had resumed the upper hand, and he answered with calmness,

“I repeat what I said before. You can speak, if you like, of that as well as of anything else, only you do not know the story you allude to.”

“Do you suppose that I do not know that

you wanted to marry the beautiful Laure d'Aigremont, who became afterwards Madame de Thérigny, and that . . .”

“Stop, I do beg of you, and let *me* speak of her. I again repeat that you do not know that history; I do, though I never allude to it.”

“I have been indiscreet, perhaps; pray forgive me. But you drove me to it.”

“I can forgive it all the more easily, that in spite of the pain I felt just now when you happened to touch that long-standing wound, it is in reality cured; yes, quite cured. The suffering is now in my memory, not in my heart.”

He paused a little, and then went on without any agitation, but not without bitterness.

“Let us then speak of my first love, though I hardly know why you should have chosen to bring that subject forward, and turned it into an argument against me.”

“My argument was, that in that case you were deluded by a romantic fancy, and that Madame d'Aigremont, when she refused your offer, did you a great service . . .”

“It may be so; but do you mean to infer

that it was on account of unfavourable provisions regarding her daughter and an interest in *my* happiness that she refused her consent?"

"No; I did not mean that exactly."

"The truth of the story is this—it is not a long one, and can be quickly told:—The d'Aigremont estate and mine were contiguous. I had known Laure since childhood. I do not remember the time when I did not care for her, and I firmly believe that she loved me as much as I loved her. When she was seventeen we looked upon ourselves as engaged to one another, though neither of us had ever clearly said so to the other, and it was with what I own was a foolish confidence that I one day asked Laure's mother to allow of our marriage. Without the slightest hesitation she rejected my proposal, and did not give me a shade of hope. You can guess why?"

"No, not quite."

"Oh, for reasons that you by no means would disapprove of. Though I am well born, I am not a grand seigneur, and though not a poor man, I was not a good match. Laure, being an only daughter, an heiress, and by her birth not unworthy of becoming the

wife of some wealthy grandee, could not be bestowed on a mere country neighbour, a *gentilhomme* of limited means. That was all, as Mercutio said of the wound he was dying of—

“‘Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door ; but 'tis enough.’

Madame d'Aigremont's eloquence did not reach higher, or descend deeper, or go further than that ; but it was enough.”

The Marquise remained silent. She was very fond of M. de Malseigne, and had so high an opinion of him that she used to say, it would be too much to expect three times in one's life to meet any one at all equal to Armand. Still she could not but feel, that had he proposed for her daughter she would have answered just as Madame d'Aigremont had done.

“ I left her without another word,” Armand went on to say. “ At the gate of the chateau I met Laure. For years afterwards I used always to see her before me as she looked at that moment, with her hat full of flowers in her hand, and her hair blown about by the wind. Her childlike face, her large eyes,

with their astonished and alarmed expression, —for something in my countenance had frightened her,—remain impressed on my memory with a painful vividness. She trembled and said,

“ ‘ What is the matter with you, Armand ? ’

“ I took her hand, kissed it, and said, ‘ *Adieu.* ’ I went home, and very nearly died of grief. . . . As soon as I recovered, and was able to travel, I left France.”

“ That was the time of your first long journey ; I remember it.”

“ Yes. I went almost round the world, and only came back when I thought I had obtained the object I had in view at the time I condemned myself to that long exile. A year after my departure I heard of Laure’s marriage with M. de Thérigny. He was not her equal in birth, but he possessed one of those immense fortunes which in these days triumph over principles, pride, and prejudices. I had accustomed myself to call her by her new name. I read in the newspapers accounts of the brilliant *fêtes* given by the young married people. Their house was mentioned as one of those in Paris

most conspicuous for all that wealth can give, and frequented by the highest society. I returned in the full belief that I should meet without danger the gay and worldly woman whom I fancied could have nothing in common with the one I had loved. . . . I saw her again. . . . You remember her at that time?"

"Of course I do, and, like everybody else, I thought her wonderfully beautiful."

"Yes; but it was not that brilliancy and that beauty which impressed me. She was not the Laure of other days. Always on the wing, surrounded by the most dangerous homage, accompanied, but not protected, by a husband foolishly proud of her beauty, and ignorant, or careless, as to the course she was pursuing. I met her without danger to myself, and saw her hurrying to destruction with almost a feeling of coldness."

"I remember that time, Armand. But as far as I recollect, you did not remain long in Paris. When you returned, two years afterwards, I never spoke to you about her, but I know that I blessed Madame d'Aigremont for not having consented to your marrying that . . ."

"Let me finish my story," Armand said, with a lingering emotion he could not quite subdue, "and then we shall never return to the subject. It happened one day by chance that I was for a few moments close to her, no matter where, and though in the midst of a crowd, we could talk as if we had been alone. For the first time she was speaking to me out of reach of other hearers, and without constraint; then she was again that charming, natural, and artless Laure I had so worshipped. . . . What she said to me during those brief instants affected me deeply. She told me what she had better not have said—that she was unhappy, her life a burden to her, she was no longer what she used to be, she hated what she now was; and then she added, 'Oh, Armand, why did you go away? why did you not come back sooner?' Those words drove me almost out of my mind; they were only too true. Yes," he continued; "believe it or not, as you will, but I am still convinced,—and I say it in the presence of God who hears me,—that if in her innocent youth she had been given to me, if I had been entrusted with the

guidance of her life, she would have been a virtuous and respected wife. She would have been preserved from sin, shame, and death !”

“And yet,” the Marquise answered, “notwithstanding the influence you had regained . . .”

Armand was once more on the point of falling into a passion, but he controlled himself.

“Listen to me to the end, Madame. I regained no influence, because I did not choose to do so. For a short time, indeed, impressed by what she had said, I thought of remaining near her. She had asked me to be her friend. I fancied this was possible ; but soon I discovered my mistake. I felt that for both of us friendship would be a snare ; in short, that to leave her was the most friendly thing I could do—and I did it. Raynald and I left Paris together. I never heard a word about her until after her death, and until this day I have never uttered her name.”

“After she disappeared,” the Marquise said, “there was a mystery as to her fate.

Her husband vanished at the same time, and when he returned to Paris five years afterwards, he had married a second wife, who was courted and flattered by the same people who had surrounded the first Madame de Thérigny, and it was reported that the latter had made a bad and a sad end."

"Her end," Armand replied, with increasing paleness and set teeth, "was such as might have been expected, considering the fate that had been forced upon her, the fatal slope on which she had not the strength to stop. Yes, her life ended in a bad, in a terrible manner."

"I never heard what the facts were. Tell me what happened to her."

"There is no occasion to dwell on the sad circumstances which induced her to leave her husband's villa near Marseilles and to embark at that place in a steamer for Leghorn. Her course had been a downward one. Begun in worldliness and frivolity, it ended in sin and shame. . . ." Armand paused an instant, and then said, "As the vessel she sailed in was coming into port on a dark and stormy night it struck against another boat. You

may remember, perhaps, accounts in the papers at that time of a dreadful collision and loss of life."

"I do remember it, but had never heard she was on board that steamer."

"No one knew that she had embarked in it except her husband, who took measures to prevent her name appearing in the list of victims."

"My dear Armand! It *is* dreadful!"

They both remained for some minutes silent. The Marquise was really affected, and Mal-seigne found it difficult to speak.

"It is indeed very dreadful," he said at last. "But I firmly believe that there are often mysteries of mercy hidden in extraordinary and frightful catastrophes; that God, who weighs and judges, punishes and forgives, allows in such hours the work of salvation to be accomplished in a few instants, and that many a poor soul thus finds its way to heaven. I trust that that unhappy one has found mercy and obtained forgiveness. This hope saved me from despair."

A strange light shone in Armand's eyes as it had done once before during this convers-

tion. It passed away, and his countenance resumed its usual calm and deep serenity.

Madame de Liminge seized his hand, pressed it, and exclaimed,

"There are few hearts and souls equal to yours, Armand."

He bent down, kissed the hand which held his own, and said,

"Well, if you think me worthy of your regard, if you have any confidence in me, —as you said just now—you look upon me as your eldest son, or your younger brother, let me ask you one question: Do you not think that Laure d'Aigremont's unhappy mother must sometimes think with regret of the peaceable and safe life her poor child would have led if she had allowed me to be her husband?"

"Yes, I dare say she does, poor woman. Pity her very much."

"Then, in that case, I do beseech you, by my devoted attachment to you, by my eternal affection for Raynald, by all that have suffered myself, and all I cannot help fearing for him, do not prepare for yourself the same sort of misery. Your life has been

a happy and an irreproachable one. Do not run the danger of feeling some day a remorseful regret, which to a soul like yours would be an intolerable pang. I implore you to listen to me."

Armand's voice was trembling with emotion. His eyes were anxiously fixed upon Madame de Liminge's face, but he did not read in it the response he expected.

"Come, Armand," she said, leaning back in her arm-chair, "do not begin again in that strain. God knows that I feel for you, my poor friend, and for that unhappy mother; but I really do not see what deduction you wish to draw from all this, or what connection there is between that sad story and my own concerns. In that case, no doubt, things turned out unhappily; but there are many girls who, in Laure d'Aigremont's position, would have remained virtuous and been happy."

"I know that very well," Armand answered. "There are girls who are perfectly satisfied if only the framework of their lives is brilliant enough, and nothing in its details too trying and painful. There are many

marriages of this sort, and, as far as they go, happy marriages. I even grant you, in spite of my personal experience, which tells the other way, that mothers, generally speaking, are prudent as regards their daughters, and select wisely for them the husband they do not allow them to choose for themselves."

"Well, I am glad that we are so far of *the* same mind."

"Have I ever given you reason to think *that* I thought otherwise? Did not I fully *approve* of Blanche's marriage? Did I show *any* anxiety as to the future of that dear *child* whom I love quite as much as Raynald?"

"Well, then, leave me to act as I think *right*."

"The two cases are entirely different. Raynald requires quite another sort of happiness, and one which is unattainable without an absolute liberty of choice. There are men, no doubt, who allow themselves to be guided and directed in such matters for the better or the worse, as may happen. But if Raynald's ideas on the subject are of a higher kind, if he is capable of a true devoted love for a woman he has himself chosen,

for God's sake respect that feeling, and act accordingly."

Madame de Liminge had by this time forgotten her transient emotion, and was getting more and more provoked by Armand's pleadings.

"Raynald's feelings!" she said, in an ironical manner. "I should really have thought that by this time you would have known better than to attach much importance to Raynald's feelings of this kind. We should be under the necessity of sanctioning strange follies if we were to consider our sons' feelings when they fancy themselves in love! In Raynald's case, it would before now have led us into queer embarrassments; you know that as well as I do."

"But in sober earnest, Madame," Armand exclaimed, with a warmth he could hardly have accounted for, "is it possible to reckon his present attachment amongst the fancies and the follies you allude to? Is there anything blameable or surprising in it? Is it not natural and reasonable to love, to admire, and to respect Eliane? Is not she charming beyond description? Do not you see it and

feel it yourself? How is it that you did not perceive that if you wanted Raynald not to love his cousin, you should never have allowed him to know her?"

The Marquise, with the points of her fingers joined together, and her eyes half shut, was closely watching Armand.

"My good friend," she said, with a slight smile, "do you know that when you plead so earnestly in Raynald's behalf, I rather suspect you of being not only a most eloquent advocate, but the most unwise and generous of men?"

No sooner had these words escaped her than Madame de Liminge would fain have recalled them, for their effect went far beyond what she had expected. Surprise and displeasure of the deepest sort were visible in Armand's face, and in a tone of icy coldness he said :

"May I request you, Madame la Marquise, to explain what you mean by this insinuation?"

Never, since at the age of fifteen he had become, to all intents and purposes, almost a member of her family, had Armand spoken

to her in such a manner. She scarcely knew how to take it.

"I meant nothing," she said. "It was only a joke."

"I call it an insult, not a joke."

"An insult! Why, what on earth has come over you, Armand? You are not like yourself."

This was true. He had quite lost his self-command, and he answered angrily,

"I do consider it an insult, and you must think me the meanest, as well as the most senseless, of men to venture thus to speak to me."

"Armand!"

"Or rather, I understand it now. This is a cruel way of closing my mouth, and of setting aside all I have said to you. Be it so, and, indeed, I have nothing more to add. . . . Only that I beg of you to remember and weigh well my words. My friendship for Raynald obliges me once more to appeal to you. And if unsuccessfully, God grant that you may not have to regret it up to the last day of your life."

He rose and left the room without giving Madame de Liminge time to answer.

CHAPTER XII.

WHILST that conversation had been going on, Eliane, quite unconscious of the storms of which she was the cause, and of those which were gathering over her future path, was reading, for the second time, her cousin's letter with a pleasure and interest beyond what at first sight that simple missive seemed likely to inspire.

"MY DEAR ELIANE" (Blanche wrote),
 "You must be surprised at my silence, and you might have been a little anxious too if you had not known by my letters to mamma—the only letters I have had time to write—that we remained at Crécy only one day (Crécy! I shall describe it to you another time, and you will come and judge of it yourself!), and then that we started for Italy. To-day I will only tell you that we went to Florence for two, and

to Rome for four days, and then took refuge here at Como, where one breathes a little, though it is still very hot. We saw all that could possibly be seen during our visits to Rome and Florence, setting out early in the morning, and coming home late at night. But I have made up my mind about several things. One is, that I have no curiosity about sight-seeing; another, that I do not know enough about art to care much for it; and thirdly, that I am not well-informed enough with regard to Italian history to be able to remember at a moment's notice who were the famous men people talk of before me, especially those who lived in the Middle Ages, for, as to Roman history, my memory is not quite so rusty. The galleries, I assure you, my dear, seemed to me full of exactly the same statues and pictures. How stupid you will think me—you who take such an interest in these things and these places, just as if you had seen them, and who know all their names by heart. But I must speak the truth; I never pretend to like what I don't care for, and especially with you who love me just as I am, and whom I love just as you are, with your cleverness,

which does not disturb me, your wisdom, which I am not afraid of, and that something which makes life so pleasant when you are with one. I shall not be able to do much longer without you, darling Eliane.

“But I am very happy; my husband is very fond of me, and does not see any faults in his little wife, and I see no faults in him. He feels just as I do with regard to what I was saying just now. We also quite agree in admiring the beautiful scenery we have been travelling through; but, above all things, we both long to return to Crécy. Yves is making new plantations there. He is building a school, and there are lots of things he is doing, which interest me quite as much as him. That place where I only spent one day is more beautiful, in my opinion, than anything we have seen since.

“What has amused us immensely has been the no end of purchases we have made for the furnishing of our rooms. You know how clever Yves is about that sort of thing, and what good taste he has. If you could but see the number of candelabras and hangings we have bought, beautiful mirrors, too, such

ducks of niggers, and cabinets such as you have never set eyes on ! It must be confessed we both like shops better than galleries. In the one case you look at things which can never belong to you, whereas . . . Oh, it will be so amusing when we get back to arrange all our purchases in the chateau.

“ And then, dear Eliane, to think of being with you again, for you know that mamma and you are coming to Crécy in October. Yves will be so glad to see you both. I need not say what my delight will be. You can guess that without my telling you, and I am sure that you also look forward with joy to that meeting, and to the fond kisses you will receive from

“ Your devoted little

“ BLANCHE.”

There was certainly nothing very remarkable in that letter, and yet Eliane pressed it to her heart and to her lips. If for a few hours on her first arrival at Erlon she had not thought much of Blanche, since then she had had but too much reason to look back with tender regret to the affection she had

always shown her. After that first evening and that first morning everything around her had changed in a way she scarcely realized, and did not understand. Not only could she see that Raynald never spoke to her but in a constrained or abrupt manner, but Madame de Liminge was also cold and reserved. Instead of the approving and kind looks she was accustomed to, her aunt's eyes were now often fixed upon her with sometimes an anxious, and sometimes a hard expression.

Eliane, who in her English home had always been in an atmosphere of affection and kindness, who up to that time had found amongst her French relatives not only the same tender regard, but superadded to it something new and yet more sweet, now felt in a moral sense the cold chill which people experience when they suddenly pass from the warmth and light of a southern clime to the cold dark regions of the north.

She long remained in the same place, buried in thoughts so numerous and confused that she could not disentangle them. As she was slowly walking back to the house Eliane

heard the noise of the cavalcade, and stopped to meet it.

Raynald jumped off his horse and offered to assist Mademoiselle de Longvilliers to dismount, but without looking at him she took her grandfather's hand and sprang lightly to the ground. A large bouquet of roses was in her hand, but her cheeks were of a still deeper red. The haughty and discontented expression of her countenance indicated that this burning flush was not the result solely of the exercise she had been taking or the heat of the day. The Duc de Longvilliers, likewise, looked cross. Tréval did not seem in spirits, but brightened up when he saw Eliane. With a mixture of politeness and self-sufficiency which were habitual to him, he said to her in a low voice—

“ I trust that I rightly understood you, and that I shall soon obtain my pardon.”

Eliane looked at him with astonishment. But had she known how to answer this incomprehensible speech she would not have had time to do so, for Constance at that moment took her arm, and led her away towards her own room. When they reached the top of

the stairs Mademoiselle de Longvilliers said, pointing to her bouquet—

“See what scarce flowers I have got. Take one of them, Eliane.”

“Scarce flowers!” Eliane answered, with a smile; “do you call moss roses scarce?”

“Certainly I do. You might search in all the finest modern gardens and not find one. But that little castle we went to see is surrounded with them. Your high and mighty cousin condescended to tell the gardener to gather these for me—after I had asked for them, mind you. It would never have entered his own head.”

She was about to say more, when the bell rung. There was hardly time for her to dress for breakfast.

“We shall meet later in the drawing-room for our lesson,” she said; “and then we can talk as much as we like. Now I must adorn myself; I have hardly half-an-hour for that important duty.”

Constance disappeared. Eliane stood still for an instant looking at the rose in her hand. Then she fastened it to her waist and went down to the drawing-room. Taking it all in

all, she had been, perhaps, the person in the house who had spent the pleasantest morning.

This thought which crossed her mind would have been confirmed if she had heard the conversation in the Duc and Duchesse de Longvilliers' room at that moment.

"Are you sure of what you say?" exclaimed the Duchesse, whilst her husband, lying back in an arm-chair, was beating his boots with his riding-whip; "are you really in earnest?"

"I am not likely to be mistaken, my dear, on such a point. You can rely on my insight. Moreover, I had told you so before; I had foreseen it."

"You had said so. . . You had foreseen it. . . That is always the way you go on when things turn out badly," the Duchesse retorted in a complaining voice.

She was a timid, sickly person, prematurely aged by her grief at the loss of her only son, killed in Africa. His wife had died a month after Constance's birth. The care and education of the little orphan had been always more of an anxiety than a consolation to her, and she was now anxious to get her married, not

only in order to secure her a happy destiny, but also to be relieved from a burdensome responsibility.

"Yes," she fretfully repeated; "that is what you always say when things do not happen as you wish."

"Whether for good or bad," the Duke replied, "my previsions are not often deceived, and I had told you not to accept Madame de Liminge's invitation without a perfect certainty that her son's wishes coincided with her own. Now I plainly see such is not the case, and I wish immediately to take Constance away."

"But how could one imagine anything so improbable?"

"Improbable or not, it ought to have been guarded against. And you ought to have done as I desired you—not paid this visit until Liminge had proposed for her."

"You are very hard upon me, M. de Longvilliers. You ought to allow that it was natural, before I committed myself further, to wish to see with my own eyes if this place was really as perfect a one as you had been told."

"Well, there is something in that, I acknowledge."

Satisfied with this concession the Duchesse continued—

"And as there was formerly a great intimacy between the two families, though latterly we have not seen much of the Liminges, the Marquise's invitation was nothing out of the common way, nor was there anything extraordinary in my accepting it; and then I had observed at Paris that Constance had rather taken a fancy to that young man."

M. de Longvilliers shrugged his shoulders.

"Just such a fancy," he said, "as she would be likely to take for any good-looking young man with Liminge's name and fortune. He is not the only *parti* possessed of those advantages. But be that as it may, you must tell Madame de Liminge this very morning that we shall leave her to-morrow."

Whenever the Duc spoke in that positive manner his wife knew that he meant to be obeyed, and though extremely annoyed, saw nothing for it but to do as she was bid. The fear of being uncivil on the one hand, and, on the other, her pride, which was wounded by

this unforeseen obstacle, disturbed her so much that she was very absent during breakfast, so much so that it would hardly have escaped observation had not most of the party been likewise more or less preoccupied.

There was an unusual frown on the Duc's brow, the Duchesse spoke at random, and without much tact. In Constance's countenance there was a disdainful expression superadded to her habitual haughtiness. The Marquise was evidently nervous, and Eliane also. There was something in M. de Tréval's manner still more inexplicable than his words. Although he was not sitting next to her he took every opportunity of speaking to her across the table, and when by direct questions he had obliged her to turn her head towards him, his eyes assumed a sentimental expression which puzzled and irritated her beyond measure. She saw that Raynald had observed those glances and her embarrassment, and she blushed deeply.

The only person quite at her ease was Madame de l'Hérès. Her incessant flow of small talk was rather useful on this occasion, not that she was quite satisfied with the amount

of attention paid her during the morning ride, but anyhow she had made one of a thoroughly aristocratic party ; she was on what she considered intimate terms with them ; henceforward she would be considered in the neighbourhood as an *habitué* of the chateau of Erlon, and no one would know exactly to what degree she had been appreciated by that distinguished society, for M. Edgar would not care to relate, even supposing he had been conscious of it, that the only reason why he had not been supplanted was that nobody tried to rob him of his conquest.

Malseigne did not appear, and when the Marquise inquired for him she was told that he had gone to Paris by the eleven o'clock train. She did not betray her discontent, and pretended not to be surprised at it. Armand, she said, was in the habit of absenting himself and of returning without any explanation ; but Raynald could not conceal his surprise. He knew that Malseigne was going to have a conversation with his mother ; he also knew what was to be the subject of it. He felt that this abrupt departure boded no good to his hopes, and his face, which had been

gloomy enough before, assumed a still darker expression.

At last this breakfast, which had seemed interminable to the hosts and most of the guests, came to an end. As soon as it was over the Duchesse drew Madame de Liminge aside, into a recess of the library where they usually spent the morning, and without preamble, but yet with considerable embarrassment, told her that an unforeseen circumstance obliged them to go away the next day.

The Marquise at once understood what this meant, and for a moment lost her self-command. Seizing the Duchesse's hand, she whispered,

"Don't, I beseech you, settle anything yet. At any rate do not change your plans until this evening."

She hardly knew what she was saying, or what she hoped from a delay, nor did she remember that she was speaking to Constance's grandmother as if they understood each other with regard to a subject on which they, no doubt, had the same wishes, but had never yet said a word.

"Not till to-night?" the Duchesse answered,

feeling her hopes revive and forgetting a little her dignity.

“No, not till to-night.”

The Duchesse tried to reconcile this concession with her husband’s positive injunction.

“Well, it remains a settled thing that we go to-morrow; but, if such is your wish, we shall say nothing about it till this evening.”

The Marquise pressed her hand, and went back to Madame de l’Héris, politeness obliging her to sit with that lady until the announcement of her carriage.

Raynald, with a newspaper in his hand, afforded her but little assistance. Constance, looking decidedly cross, had taken up a book and seated herself near the window. The Duc and Duchesse were pacing up and down the broad alley talking eagerly. Eliane alone did her best to second her aunt’s efforts at conversation.

At last the little victoria was at the door, and Madame de l’Héris hastened to depart, for during the last hour heavy dark clouds had been gathering in the sky, the air had

become sultry and oppressive, and everything presaged a storm likely enough to overtake her if she did not make the best of her way home. Raynald, inspired with a sudden ardour of civility, offered his arm to conduct her to her carriage. She little guessed how delighted he was to see her off, and took leave of him with most gracious smiles and bows.

He remained a few minutes outside the house, gazing on a sky hardly as dark and gloomy as his thoughts. As he was returning to the library, where his mother had remained, he suddenly turned back and went to his own room; for a wonder, he had an hour to himself, and felt the need of solitude and quiet. The state of the atmosphere at that moment fairly represented his condition of mind. A storm—he knew it—was hanging over him. He had no doubt on that subject; when and how it was to burst he could not tell, but it was close at hand and inevitable.

As soon as Madame de l'Héris had gone Constance jumped up, threw aside her book, and carried off Eliane to the grand salon, which was scarcely ever occupied except in

the evening. Madame de Liminge was glad that the two girls had left the room, for she felt that the moment was come for a decisive conversation with her son. She was meditating on the manner in which she should begin it ; but when the door opened it was not Raynald, but Horace de Tréval who came in.

Seeing that the Marquise was alone, he eagerly begged to say a few words to her in private.

"Certainly," she answered; and guessing at once what he was come about, a gleam of joy shot through her eyes.

She was now afraid that Raynald would interrupt them, and looked anxiously at the door.

"You wish to speak to me alone?" she asked.

"Yes, I do, Madame; and as I saw Raynald going into his room, and the Duc and Duchesse out of doors . . ."

"Of course, of course," Madame de Liminge answered.

She was greatly relieved, and thought all would now go on smoothly.

"But come to my room," she said; "we can talk more quietly there. My niece and Mademoiselle de Longvilliers are playing and singing in the drawing-room; the noise would disturb us."

M. de Tréval followed the Marquise into the little salon, where some hours before she had conversed with Malseigne.

CHAPTER XIII.

As soon as Constance entered the drawing-room she threw open the pianoforte, and at first seemed to think only of the lesson she was about to give. Eliane patiently waited the result of her companion's researches in a music-book she held on her knees.

"Here it is," she said at last. "This is what I was looking for. It is very easy, and will just suit your voice. Begin by repeating the words as I say them.

" ' Ah ! non credea mirarti
 Si presto estinto o fiore !
 Passasti al par d'amore
 Che un giorno sol durò.' "

"What does it mean ?" Eliane asked.

"It means, I did not expect to see thee so soon withered. Oh, flower ! thou hast passed away like love which lasts but one day."

Eliane took the music-book and read attentively over the words. Then she read them out loud.

“Very well indeed, Eliane; I told you that with so good an ear as yours you would easily catch the pronunciation of those lines. You repeat them just as well as if you understood Italian.”

“Your translation has made me understand the words.”

“Then I shall sing them, and you shall sing them after me.”

Eliane had never heard that air of Bellini’s more familiar, perhaps, to the past than to the present generation. She listened to it with her eyes fixed on the music she still held in her hands.

“Now try yourself to sing it,” Constance said.

Eliane bent forward to place the book on the desk. In doing so she knocked off the rose which she was wearing, and its leaves fell scattered on the floor.

“Oh, my poor rose!” she exclaimed, with more regret than the circumstance seemed to call for.

Constance laughed, and sang,

“‘ Ah ! non credea mirarti
Si presto estinto o fiore !’

“ Nothing could be more appropriate.”

Eliane made no answer, and tried to overcome her unreasonable vexation. She sang and rendered very exactly the words as Constance had pronounced them. She was gifted with the sort of musical memory which can reproduce on the pianoforte whatever it has heard even but once. Her voice had the same capacity, so that her success entirely justified Constance’s expectations.

“ It is perfect,” she exclaimed, “ quite perfect. I declare any one who heard you pronounce nothing but those four lines would take you for an Italian. You must admit, too, that I have a gift for teaching, which is, in fact, the power of making others understand what one means.”

Delighted with her pupil, she made her repeat two or three times the same passage, took real pains to perfect her accent and her method,* and seemed quite interested and engrossed by her self-imposed task. But all

at once her mood changed. She left the piano, and threw herself on a canopy in the middle of the room. There she remained for a few minutes without saying a word, her elbow resting on a cushion and her head leaning on her hand.

Eliane, much surprised, asked her if anything was the matter.

"Have I without meaning it done anything to vex you?"

Constance raised her head.

"You, Eliane? Oh dear, no; I think you the nicest girl I ever met with. I am not surprised that Blanche de Monléon doats upon you. . . . So should I if I had been your cousin. . . . It is really quite a pity . . ."

She stopped short, blushed, and then seeing Eliane's puzzled look, laughed heartily.

"Yes, I assure you I should have wished no better than to be your cousin, if that stupid Raynald had been of the same mind."

Eliane coloured a little; her heart was beating fast, and when she realized the meaning of what Constance had said her agitation could hardly have escaped notice if it had

not been that the blinds were down, and the storm darkening the room.

She longed to question Constance, but did not venture to speak. There was, however, no necessity for it. When not in one of her haughty or sulky moods, Mademoiselle de Longvilliers was communicative enough. At that moment she felt inclined to talk.

"Come now," she said, "I am going to speak quite openly to you. Only promise not to repeat what I shall say."

Eliane had no difficulty in giving this promise.

"I feel confidence in you, Eliane ; . . . and then, you see, there are likenesses between us."

"Are there ?"

"Yes ; we are both orphans ; neither of us have any brothers or sisters. I have been told that you were devotedly attached to your grandfather—the one who brought you up. And I, too, love my grandfather very much."

"I see now what you mean."

"Well, now listen to me. You will easily guess that, as I was eighteen last spring, grandpapa and grandmamma think I ought

to marry ; and so do I. Why do you look surprised ?”

This was said in consequence of something in Eliane’s face which betrayed the effect that this sort of way of talking about marriage always had upon her.

“Don’t you think it is very natural ? Grandpapa is excessively fond of me, but he is very strict. Grandmamma is always sad, and often ill. I assure you that ours is a very dull house. So of course I was very much pleased this year when, at the end of Lent, Horace de Tréval began to visit us. There again you are surprised. Every minute you look as if you were falling from the clouds. It is your only fault, Eliane ! Yes, Horace de Tréval ; there is nothing in that to astonish any one. His mother was a Longvilliers, and he will inherit the title. Only there was some coldness between grandpapa and his father ; but fortunately old M. de Tréval died, and then he made friends with us. I was very civil to him. I did not dislike him at all, and I think he liked me very much. But then at Yves de Monléon’s wedding I saw your cousin Raynald,

and I immediately took a greater fancy to him, and left off thinking of Horace de Tréval. He is rich, or I would not have given him a thought, and he will be a Duc some day, which is rather pleasant; but he has not so large a fortune as M. de Liminge. His family is not so good, and though he looks distinguished, he is not like your cousin—a living image of one of Vandyke's portraits. There is, in fact, no comparison between the two. I did not hesitate a moment about it."

"Then had Raynald asked you to marry him?"

"Not a bit of it. What a simple creature you are! But everybody knows that Madame de Liminge has entirely the upper hand in her family, and I soon guessed why, on the day of Blanche's marriage, she invited us here, and why grandmamma accepted so readily the invitation, and for what purpose we came to Erlon, and are here still! Oh, yes."

"Je n'y suis que pour vous, barbare que vous etes," * Constance exclaimed, addressing

* "For your sake alone I am here, barbarous as you are."

in a tragical tone Raynald's portrait. Then bursting out laughing, she said, "I am not going to die of grief, you may rely upon it; but since this morning I have made up my mind that your fair cousin has not the slightest intention of proposing for me."

"Since this morning, did you say?"

"Yes; I had the proof of it beyond a doubt."

"How can that be?"

"I am going to tell you. In the first place I must observe, that when we arrived here he was barely civil to me. But I said to myself, 'It does not signify; I am rich, well born, handsome, he will not easily find so desirable a *parti*,' and I felt pretty confident that it would all end as I wished. And indeed on the following day his manner was rather more flattering, and last night very much so; but this morning during the ride he hardly spoke at all, and when we arrived at that little chateau,—which, by the way, is the prettiest little manor-house you ever saw,—that intolerable Madame de l'Héris, with the tact which seems to belong to her, exclaimed, 'What a charming place

this would be for a honeymoon !' and offered to bet with M. de Liminge, that before six months were elapsed he would make use of it for that purpose."

"What did he answer?"

"I was going to tell you. When she made this sensible speech we were standing near the door of a library, where there are heaps of curiosities which I was examining. Grand-papa was looking out of the window, but I am pretty sure that he heard—as well as I did—every word of M. de Liminge's reply. 'I would not accept that bet,' he said, 'seeing that I should be perfectly certain of winning. There is no chance of my being married six months hence.' 'Well, let us say a year,' the lady rejoined. 'That would not alter the case.' 'Then is it *never* to be?' '*Never* is a strong word; but on the subject in question perhaps the nearest to the mark.'"

Mademoiselle de Longvilliers was so engrossed by her own thoughts that she took no notice of Eliane's silence. After a pause she added, twisting the curls on her forehead—

"Yes, he said so; and there was something in his manner still more significant than the

words themselves. I have thought over it, and this hint, joined to my previous observations, have convinced me that M. de Liminge does not think of me, or of any one else, and so, of course, I leave off thinking of him. He evidently does not intend to marry at present. This is better than if another girl had cheated me out of this marriage."

Eliane had been listening with breathless attention, but still could find a word to say, and Constance continued :

"I am, I confess, a little piqued that I did not make him change his mind ; but never mind, I won't let him fancy that I am sorry or disappointed, I am too proud for that, and so as long as I remain here I mean to be as merry as possible. And, indeed, I do not *really* mind it. Rich and handsome as he is, there are others in the field as wealthy and as good-looking. After all, I have plenty to choose out of."

At that moment a flash of lightning, followed by a tremendous thunder-clap, startled the two girls. Absorbed in their conversation, they had not observed that the storm which had been rumbling at a distance was now

bursting over their heads. They rose, and Constance said,

“A thunderbolt must have fallen close to the house. Are you afraid of lightning?”

“No.”

“Neither am I; but grandmamma is so terrified at it that she must be in a terrible state. I must go to her, for in these cases grandpapa does nothing but scold, and I coax and quiet her.” •

She ran out of the drawing-room; Eliane remained alone. Her head was aching; the heat of the room intense. She drew up one of the blinds and, though the rain was falling in torrents, opened the window and breathed the air with a sort of rapture. Was it only the refreshing coolness after the burning heat which was so delightful to her then? No; she knew this was not the case. Though little apt to analyze her own feelings, she was incapable of that wilful self-deception which some people indulge in. Even on the previous day she might still have hesitated as to the cause of her secret disquietude since Constance de Longvilliers' arrival. She could no longer doubt about it now that she felt so intensely

happy that Raynald did not care for her, did not intend to marry her. She had feared to lose a brother and more than a brother ; now she hoped that their happy days would begin again.

Every one of his words came back to her mind. She dwelt upon them one by one, allowed her thoughts to wander in a vague manner, and then turned them to the future. With one hand pressed over her eyes, she sank into so deep an abstraction that time went by without her noticing it. The rain fell on her hair and on her brow, and half-an-hour elapsed before she raised her head.

The storm was then over, a soft wind driving away the clouds. The rain-drops were glittering on every green bough in the returning sunshine ; whilst the scent of the flowers and the woods—nature's own incense—was wafted towards her, and, like the incense in our churches, inspired the wish to kneel and worship God.

Such, at any rate, was what Eliane felt, and that impulse was all the stronger in consequence of the thoughts which had just engrossed her. Sincere, deep, solemn thoughts

they were, and—even more than she then knew—about to rule and to influence her whole life. She raised her eyes to the skies, a smile was on her lips; but in the earnest expression of her face there was a strange union of firm resolution and indescribable sweetness.

She never forgot the short and happy hour which had followed the violent storm of that eventful day. Poor Eliane! short indeed was that hour, and short the gleam of joy which dark clouds were about to supersede. For an instant life rose before her adorned with bright hues; for an instant she opened her heart to those youthful previsions of love and happiness sometimes realized, sometimes deceived, and not seldom blighted by a fulfilment which proves them to have been delusions.

But when such is not the case, when the early dream of youth has been the anticipation of a possible and permitted happiness sanctioned by reason as well as by the heart's instinct, which, according to Pascal, is the highest of those two faculties, then it sometimes becomes identified with a human life, and lasts as long as existence itself, unless a

still nobler vision takes its place and throws it into the shade.

It was with reluctance that Eliane moved away from the window. She felt an instinctive dread of interrupting the current of her thoughts. She almost foresaw that with that hour her dreams would vanish.

It was time, however, to go up-stairs, for the clock had struck four. As she was slowly crossing the drawing-room she saw on the desk of the piano Constance's music-book, and it occurred to her that she might as well practise once more the passage she had learnt. If her teacher had been there she would have been better satisfied than ever with the result of her lesson. Eliane, without knowing it, sang this time with an expression which, being alone, she did not try to restrain.

*" Passasti al par d'amore
Che un giorno sol durò."*

She pronounced those words with a thrilling accent. They were sad, but she thought them charming, and full of that sort of melancholy so attractive to young people, especially when they have not yet known the reality of disappointment and blighted hopes.

As she was leaving the piano Eliane was startled and almost alarmed at seeing Raynald standing behind her, leaning against the door of the library, which Constance had left open. His arms were crossed, his face pale, and a gloomy look in his eyes.

“Good heavens, Raynald!” she said in a trembling voice, “what has happened? you look so grave. How long have you been there?”

He went up to the pianoforte, and without answering, closed the book she had been singing from.

“It is not love,” he passionately exclaimed. “It is not love, but hope, that can begin and end the same day.”

Eliane’s bright dreams seemed to vanish at those words. Her heart sank within her.

“Who are you alluding to?” she asked. “And why do you speak as if you were displeased with me?”

Raynald controlled himself, and said in a different tone,

“Forgive me, Eliane. You are quite right, I have no business to complain; I can lay no claim to your confidence, and ought not to be surprised that you do not show me any.”

"I do not understand what you mean."

"I was in the next room, but I had no idea that you were here. You began to sing that song which I had never heard you sing before. I thought that you did not know Italian. Somehow or other those words in your mouth made me lose my head and speak foolishly. After all, you are your own mistress, and it is not for me to question you as to your intentions."

"What intentions are you talking of? Come now, you must explain yourself more clearly. I have not the least guess as to what you mean."

"If you please, Eliane, do not speak in that way if you want me to keep my temper. It is not worthy of you to pretend not to understand me. You know very well that I am speaking of Horace."

Eliane coloured, not from consciousness, but resentment.

"M. de Tréval! What has he to do with me or my intentions?"

"This is too bad, Eliane. I implore you, do not act a part."

"I act a part!"

“Is it not a piece of acting to pretend that Horace has not, with your sanction, proposed for you.”

Indignation flashed in Eliane's eyes.

• “With my sanction! What nonsense—what a falsehood!”

“A falsehood! Did you say a falsehood? Good God! is it then possible—”

He stopped, and tried to master his agitation.

“Eliane, it is wrong of me to question you,” he said. “I have no right to do so, and your answer will perhaps increase instead of diminish my wretchedness; but still I must ask you to tell me the truth. Horace is conceited and presumptuous, but I believe him to be incapable of lying. He thinks you have encouraged him to propose for you.”

“To whom has he made this proposal?” Eliane said, in a manner the coldness of which she was not conscious of.

“To her whose adopted daughter you are.”

“Madame de Liminge is not my mother, and even if she were it would not give her the right or the power to dispose of my fate. As to what M. de Tréval chooses to suppose on

the subject, I cannot think he would venture to repeat it either to me or before me."

Eliane had turned away from her cousin. Her independent spirit chafed under a sense of injustice. Though very gentle in character, she had a sensitive nature. What Raynald had said had wounded her to the quick. How could he believe what he had just stated? and why did he speak to her of M. de Tréval?

She was vexed, and could hardly restrain her tears. Her manner was cold and proud, and she was going to leave the room without uttering another word.

"Stop a moment, Eliane!" Raynald cried, in a tremulous voice.

She turned, and her calm, beautiful, earnest eyes met his eager gaze, in which she read, as she had done twice before, something which plainly said, "I love you."

Her own heart had just found out its own secret. But brief as a flash of lightning was that moment. Raynald recollected himself, and checked the words which were rushing to his lips. He remembered that it was not lawful for him to speak of the joy he had just felt, any more than of the love and the grief

which filled his soul. He remembered that even within the last hour the abyss which divided them had widened instead of diminishing, and that honour, and even his respect and tenderness for Eliane, condemned him to the torture of silence.

One instant more they remained in the same position, both as pale as death, and with their eyes fixed on each other; then Eliane turned her head away and walked out of the room. He did not this time try to detain her, but remained gazing on the door she had shut behind her with the same sort of pain at his heart as if the grave had closed upon her beloved form.

CHAPTER XIV.

M. DE TRÉVAL, as Raynald had truly said, was not a man capable of telling a lie, but he was equally incapable of understanding what Eliane's coldness and reserve ought to have convinced him of. He had a high opinion of himself; he possessed every advantage of position and fortune which could recommend him to match-making mothers, and as regarded their daughters, he had no doubt as to his powers of attraction. It was with considerable self-complacency that he thought of his own disinterestedness in following the fancy he had taken to Eliane, and proposing for her in spite of her comparatively small fortune. He could not for a moment suppose that she would not be touched by so much generosity. He had never been in love before, and it would have been most extraordinary and, indeed, unnatural

that the girl who had been so happy as to inspire him with such a feeling should not reciprocate it. There was, no doubt, something very peculiar about her. It was this which had captivated him, and for that reason, and taking into account her English education, he had spoken to her in a way which might not perhaps have so much offended her in another case, but which on M. de Tréval's part she could not endure. She refused to listen to him ; she gave him no answer.

Horace, though rather puzzled at this rebuff, tried to account for it in his own mind by supposing that she had been displeased at this infraction of French customs which he had certainly been guilty of. The reply she gave to his excuses he interpreted in this sense, and thus entirely misunderstood her.

It was, therefore, quite in good faith that he opened the subject with Madame de Liminge, who was, as we know perfectly well, inclined to favour his wishes. She was still more pleased when he told her, that having ventured to express his feelings to Mademoiselle de Liminge, she had given him to understand that, according to French custom, it was to

her aunt, not to herself, that his proposal must be made.

The Marquise and Eliane's admirer came speedily to a happy conclusion. Nothing could be more agreeable to Madame de Liminge or more cordial than their mutual congratulations. For that day, however, she had something else on her hands, which would be facilitated, perhaps, by what she had now been told. So she asked Horace to go back to Paris and await there Eliane's answer, which would reach him the next day; and M. de Tréval left the chateau perfectly convinced that before twenty-four hours had elapsed he would be summoned back by the Marquise as her niece's accepted suitor.

As soon as he had departed Raynald, even before his mother had had time to send for him, came into her room.

A long conversation with Malseigne the evening before had enlightened him as to her plans regarding Mademoiselle de Longvilliers, and this had tenfold increased his irritation, already aroused by the encouragement given to Horace's suit. He believed himself bound to sacrifice his own feelings to his duty

towards his mother, but this was the utmost limit to which his submission could be carried.

The conversation between his mother and himself was a short one. The Marquise, perhaps, did not credit her son with as much tenacity of purpose as he really possessed; still she clearly saw that with regard to the Longvilliers' marriage it would not be expedient to continue a struggle at present. This once discerned she abandoned it. Like all those who know how to govern, she never did anything useless, and remained satisfied with a partial success when there seemed no possibility of obtaining a complete one. It was enough for the time being to have stifled in the bud her son's senseless project; and though she was vexed at her failure, she would have said nothing more if Raynald, yielding to a sudden impulse, had not added—

“You know, my dear mother, I must repeat it over and over again, that there is one only person I can love. If you refuse your consent, which for the last time I implore, you can easily understand that here I cannot remain. I must leave you. . . .”

. The Marquise thought during a moment, of which she little knew the importance, and then said,—

“Well, perhaps it would be as well if you were to absent yourself for a while.”

“I certainly will, and perhaps for a longer time than you expect. Oh, dearest mother!” he exclaimed with great emotion, kneeling by her side as he used to do in his childhood, “dearest mother, once more let me throw myself on your mercy. . . . The whole future of my life—my soul—is at this moment in your hands. . . .”

It would have been fortunate for the Marquise if she had understood the earnestness of this appeal, and foreseen the consequences of her inflexibility; but she had a supreme aversion for what she called sentimental speeches, and took no more account of them than of the utterances of a delirious person. Her son was talking nonsense she thought, and without hesitation, and in an ironical manner, she answered—

“Before falling in love it would be well to know that the object of this fine passion is not thinking of somebody else. It is of no

use to talk of marrying without knowing that you would be accepted."

Raynald started up as if he had been shot, and asked for an explanation of these words. She gave him what she supposed to be an exact account of her conversation with Horace.

Such had been the interview which had preceded the scene related in the last chapter. If Eliane had seen and known what had taken place she would have better understood Raynald's words, and a less painful impression would have remained on her mind. But as it was, she could not regain her usual composure, and paced up and down her room in a state of nervous agitation. She was vexed with others and vexed with herself. An hour ago all had seemed bright and clear, the future full of hope and joy. Now, everything in her mind was dim and confused; and to a nature like hers, the most painful part of it was that she felt angry with her aunt, angry with Horace, angry with Raynald, and, on that account, angry with herself.

She was in this state when the door was

thrown open, and Constance rushed into her room.

"Here is a pretty kettle of fish," she exclaimed. "I shall burst if I do not vent my ill-humour—not on you, Eliane, but by giving my tongue full liberty. No one can hear us, I suppose?"

Eliane shook her head.

"Well, M. de Liminge has taken himself off!"

Eliane could hardly speak, her heart was beating so fast.

"When did he go?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"At five o'clock, and Horace de Tréval at four."

"Is M. de Tréval gone?"

"Oh dear, yes, and M. de Malseigne this morning. It is a general *sauve qui pent*, a regular rout. Not very flattering for you and for me, Eliane! But I should be more inclined to laugh than to rack my head to find out what has possessed those gentlemen, if it was not that grandpapa has got on his high horse, and he too wants to go away at once."

"Not to-day?"

"Yes, this evening. He declares that the departure of the master of the house whilst we are staying here is a want of courtesy he cannot put up with."

"Well, it does seem—"

"Yes, indeed, it does seem strange," Constance said, drawing herself up with a haughtiness which did not misbecome her, "that M. de Liminge should have forgotten the respect due to the Duc and Duchesse de Longvilliers. As to myself, the only thing I am very sorry for is not to have had the opportunity of showing M. Raynald that I do not care a bit about him. I own I should have liked him to be fully persuaded of that."

Whilst she was speaking Eliane thought—

"Why it was only yesterday that she said she preferred him to everybody else, and to-day she does not care the least about him! She had hoped to be his wife,—Raynald's wife,—and now without a regret, without an effort, she gives him up. Is this true dignity of character? Is it mean to suffer?"

Constance went on.

"But what I do mind, Eliane, is parting with you."

“And shall you really go to-day?”

“Yes, we certainly shall; my grandfather is quite resolved upon it, for the reason I have told you. But do not say anything about it, for of course an excuse will be made. This morning he spoke of a letter which obliged him to go to-morrow; now a telegram, I suppose, will hasten our departure, and at eight o'clock this evening I shall have to say good-bye to you, Eliane.”

Thus ended the visit to Erlon, from which the Marquise had expected such brilliant results. It was the first great disappointment of her life, and it touched both her feelings and her pride. As nothing, however, had been said about the intended marriage, and the Longvilliers were of course desirous to make it appear that it had never been in question, both sides had to behave as if no cause for vexation existed, and for such well-bred people it did not prove difficult to keep up this semblance to the last.

The guests departed with many courteous expressions of regret, which the Marquise reciprocated with calm and dignified politeness. She indeed in her secret heart did not

acknowledge herself defeated, and therefore acted her part with all the better grace.

Constance, who was more put out than she pretended to be, was in a hurry to go. She had, however, taken a great fancy to Eliane, and there was no affectation in the sorrow she showed at parting with her. Little did she think that this charming friend of hers had been the real, though unconscious, cause of all the events of that day.

As to Eliane, what she was beginning to discern on that subject occasioned her a sort of suffering she had never known before. When the light began to wane, when the Longvilliers were gone, and solitude reigned in the chateau, so full of life and animation on the previous evening, and she found herself alone with her aunt, she felt as if an icy cloud was hanging over her. Now she guessed what it was that made the Marquise sad, and sat at a little distance from her, not venturing to speak, as abashed as if she was guilty of some fault and deeply anxious, for she saw before her what she feared even more than suffering—a contest with Madame de Liminge.

Short, however, was this suspense. It was not the Marquise's habit to give way to depression. She wiped a few tears which had found their way down her cheeks, and made a sign to Eliane to come and sit by her side. The conversation she was about to have with her niece was her last ray of hope, and she was in a hurry to begin it. She did so in the maternal and affectionate manner with which she had always treated Eliane up to the last few days, and entered at once on the all-important subject.

Eliane coloured when M. de Tréval's name was mentioned, but listened respectfully, and did not venture to interrupt her aunt, but when, encouraged by her silence, the Marquise ended by saying, "I see, my dear child, that what I have said is no surprise to you, and I am glad of it, for I hope it shows that M. de Tréval was right when he told me that you had refused to listen to him before he had spoken to me, which of course I much approve, but that he thought you had authorized him to ask my consent," Eliane quickly answered—

"It is true that I refused to listen to him,

quite true ; but he is entirely mistaken if he thinks I gave him any encouragement. God forbid !”

“God forbid ! And why on earth should you *not* have encouraged him ? M. de Tréval is a man any girl ought to be glad to marry. He is well principled, well bred, very rich, and his position in the world everything that can be desired ; his very decided attachment and admiration for you are also very flattering. . . . You know, my dear girl, how fond I am of you, but you must let me tell you that you are perfectly ignorant as to the world in which you live. Let me guide you, my child ; I might almost say that I insist upon it. . . .”

It was getting quite dark, and the Marquise could not see the face of the young girl by her side, until the moon, which up to that moment had been veiled by clouds, shone suddenly into the room and revealed to her that Eliane was as white as a sheet, and tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Good heavens, my dear !” she exclaimed. “What on earth is the matter ? What makes you cry ? Are you ill ? Let me

ring the bell and send for Mademoiselle Silvestre."

"Oh, for God's sake don't."

"Let us have candles then."

"No, let us stay as we are; I shall feel it easier to say what will displease you, but say it I must."

She seized her aunt's hands and kissed them.

"Do not ask me to marry M. de Tréval, or any one else. I do not wish to marry; I wish to remain as I am. On every other point I will obey you, but *never* as to this."

It was the second time that day that the Marquise had heard that word *never* uttered in opposition to her will. It sounded strangely in her ears, though in this instance—pronounced in the sweetest voice imaginable—it expressed an unconquerable volition. She made an effort, however, to bend that youthful will to hers, which she felt ought to predominate.

"And if I were to reply that, convinced as I am of what is best for you, I insist on your obedience?"

"I would answer," Eliane rejoined with

firmness, though she could hardly command her voice, "that nothing would ever constrain me to submit to this. Not if I was to lose yours and Blanche's affection—everything I care most for in this world—you *never* would obtain it from me."

Madame de Liminge felt that she was baffled by a will as strong as her own—stronger than her son's. Raynald had also a few hours before uttered the word *never*, and she had given way for the time being, but with a persistent hope that she would yet carry her point. But with Eliane she felt at once that the case was hopeless. She saw the necessity of foregoing a scheme which she had fondly cherished and connected with another still more important to her.

It proved a bitter pill to swallow—the last of the cruel disappointments of that day, aggravated also by her previous confidence in a different result, and a suspicion as to the cause of this refusal, which she was, however, determined neither to admit or to discuss; for if there was one thing she held in greater contempt than a young man's fancies, it was sentiment in a girl.

"You have not been wisely brought up, Eliane," she said, after a pause. "You have romantic ideas, and nothing could be more unfortunate for you. I see there is no help for it; you must act as you choose. I shall write this evening to the Comte de Tréval, to say that you reject his proposals."

These words were said with the utmost coldness, and in a few minutes the Marquise withdrew to her own apartment, and did not allow her niece as usual to accompany her.

After all the emotions of that day, Eliane sat in her room alone. She did not weep. Everything now was evident to her. The various scenes of that day—little understood at the time—explained one another. Raynald cared for her, Raynald loved her. She felt it, she said it to herself, she was sure of it, but at that moment with more pain than joy. Stern realities were before her, the time for dreaming was past. She resolved not to lament or complain, but to look in the face the truth and her own hard fate. What Constance had told her of Madame de Liminge's plans and intentions, those she had formed with regard to herself and M. de Tréval, Raynald's anger, his

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despair, and his departure, plainly showed her how insuperable was the obstacle which divided them. Yes, she could not doubt that it was insuperable, for she had not spent a whole year under her aunt's roof without acquiring a knowledge of the unconquerable nature of her resolutions. She did not try to shut her eyes to the natural consequences of this peculiarity of character, but almost took part, as it were, with Raynald's mother against him and against herself. It was of course the duty of a son to submit his wishes to those of so devoted, so affectionate, so superior a mother. It would be ungrateful of him to act against her will.

Then she turned to the consideration of her own fate, and dispassionately viewed it on her knees in the presence of God. Higher thoughts than those of earth had always had an easy access to her soul; but for some days past those blessed inspirations had not visited it as usual. Her mind had been too distracted. Now they returned with a strong and soothing power. She felt in that hour the suffering mingled with joy — "*Croce e delizie*" — of which poets have written indeed, but whose

full and deep meaning only saints can understand.

On the following morning Eliane was kneeling by the side of Mademoiselle Silvestre in the village church, where Mass was said on week days at six in the morning. On that account she had not hitherto attended it.

"You have risen very early to-day, my dear," her old friend said on their way to the hamlet.

"Yes," Eliane answered; "I had lost my good habits. I now mean to resume them."

CHAPTER XV.

A NOVEMBER day was drawing to its close in Rome ; but, as is often the case there, so warm and beautiful had it been that people were driving about in open carriages like in the summer. And if, now that the Angelus was ringing from every church and convent, men accustomed to the climate were putting on their great-coats, and women wrapping themselves up in shawls and furs, it was because that hour of the day—often the loveliest of all—is known to be perfidious, and sometimes fatal, to those not on their guard.

Amongst the numerous equipages which thronged that day the alleys of the Pincio, one *calèche* was conspicuous, not only by the beauty of the horses and their speed, but also the distinguished appearance of its occupant—a handsome woman in the prime of life. Leaning back on her cushions, her mouth

covered with a Zébeline muff, she gracefully bent her head in return for all the bows which greeted her on the way.

This was the Princess Hermione Mazzolini, whose salon was the most fashionable in Rome at a time when the most superior elements of other European societies were wont to meet in the Eternal City.

All of a sudden the Princess sat up in her carriage and looked back with an expression of evident surprise. A young man on foot had just passed her. He had seemed rather to hesitate whether to bow or not.

"Can it be him, or only some one very like him?" she said to herself, turning to catch sight of the person in question.

But before she could do so he had descended the steps leading to the Piazza di Spagna and disappeared.

The Princess did not, however, resume her indolent attitude, and a few minutes afterwards, when another acquaintance of hers made her a deep bow, she stopped the carriage at the corner of the Via Gregoriana, and beckoned to that individual to come and speak to her.

"I want to say a word to you, Loriani; but

first put on your hat, or you will catch the fever."

The person thus addressed hastened to comply with that injunction, and leaning against the door of the carriage, said in a half-respectful, half-familiar manner,

"What are the Princess's commands?"

"I wish to find out something, and you can help me better than any one else."

"I am at your orders, Princess."

"I met on the Pincio just now a young man who bowed to me."

"E poi? . . ."

"He bowed, but with some hesitation, like a person who does not care to be recognized."

"I would bet anything that it was il bel Rinaldo."

"Well, exactly; that was what struck me; but . . ."

"I have no doubt it was him."

"But Raynald de Liminge is not at Rome?"

"Yes, he is; I heard yesterday that he has been here some time."

"And has not called upon me! and seemed embarrassed when he saw me! What can it mean?"

"Chi lo sa?" Loriani said; but there was a look in his face which showed that he knew more than he chose to say.

"You are not, I hope, going to make a mystery of what I particularly want to find out, for I own that it puzzles me very much."

"Oh dear no."

"Then explain to me why he is here without coming near us. Why does he hide like a conspirator?"

"It is a long story. I cannot tell it you standing on my legs in the street."

"Well, then, come early this evening. Until ten we shall be alone. Learn all that you can on the subject. I won't be left in the dark about it."

"Your orders shall be obeyed."

"Of course! a reverderci, Signor Maestro."

"I am your Excellency's humble servant."

The Princess smiled and drove on.

The Maestro Vincenzo Loriani dutifully arrived at the appointed hour at the Palazzo Mazzolini. The Princess had promised to be *alone*, which meant alone with her husband, their two sons, their three daughters, an Abbé, who was the boys' tutor, a French governess,

the Prince's secretary and his librarian, the chaplain, and an old friend, who, because he was old and poor and lonely, dined every day with their Excellencies, who thought it a matter of course that he should seek and find in their house all that he did not possess in his solitary home.

This family party was sitting in a salon both simple and magnificent, the ceiling painted in fresco, and the walls covered with pictures by the old Italian masters, some of them still occupying the places they had originally been painted for. But intimate as were the component parts of this small circle, it was still too numerous for the mysterious disclosure Loriani was expected to make. It was accordingly delayed until the governess had carried off the young ladies of eleven and eight years of age to bed. The sons, the eldest of whom was seventeen, retired with the Abbé, and the secretary, the librarian, and the chaplain discreetly withdrew, for such was their habit at half-past nine. Then the company being reduced to the Prince, the Princess, and the above-mentioned old friend, the Commandatore Pompeo Gorgoni, she exclaimed, •

"Now, Loriani, let us hear what you have to tell us."

Loriani was a man of about forty-five years of age, whose figure was as coarse as his countenance was refined. It was genius as well as intelligence that beamed in his face. His penetrating, satirical eyes would have been somewhat alarming if his mouth had not expressed an amount of kindness, which was indeed a marked feature of his character. He was an excellent musician, clever as a composer, perfect at accompanying, and singularly well informed. He had acquired the habits and manners of the fashionable society into which he had, by a sort of common consent, been exceptionally admitted, and divided his time agreeably enough between the aristocratic salons where he was always welcome, and those of the artistic world, to which he belonged by his birth and profession.

"Well, I really must confess," he said, "that I have not much to tell you beyond the fact that Rinaldo has been here for six weeks . . ."

"And yet you said it was too long a story to tell me in the street!"

"What Rinaldo are you talking of?" asked

the Prince. "Is it Raynald de Liminge, who used to pass his life here two years ago?"

"Yes, the very man."

"Who used to be at your feet, Hermione?"

"You say that, Peppino, of every creature that sets his foot in the house."

"Well, I am not so far wrong," the admiring husband retorted.

"It *is* the same person we are speaking of," the Princess said.

"That Frenchman who spoke Italian so wonderfully well?" the Commandatore inquired.

"Yes," she repeated, "the very same."

"And he has never been to see us!" the Prince exclaimed.

"No; and what I want to hear is—what Loriani will now tell us—the reason of this mysterious conduct."

"I do not know any details, only it seems certain that there is a love-story in the case, that he has met with some great sorrow or disappointment, and has been travelling now for more than a year. He went to Asia and the centre of Africa, rushed about the world in a wild manner, and now detests society, at

Paris as well as at Rome, as much as he formerly enjoyed it. I am told that since he has been here he takes long walks in the Campagna, setting out at dawn of day and carefully avoiding his acquaintances, of which there are numbers here just now. He spends his evenings, so they say, at Professor Biagio Marini's house."

"That learned old fellow who is always at work on Dantè?" the Commandatore asked.

"Precisely so. It appears that Rinaldo devotes himself, with him, to the deepest study of the altissimo poeta, and that this is at present his only occupation and amusement."

"How very strange. Where did you get this information?" the Princess inquired.

"Partly from a young artist at the *Accademia Francese*, who is a friend of mine, and knows M. de Liminge, and partly from that scamp Taddeo Marini, the Impresario, who is as unlike as possible to his learned brother. I met him yesterday; and as he happened to mention Biagio's daughter . . ."

"Oh, oh," the Prince exclaimed; "the old gentleman has a daughter, then . . ."

"Yes; he has a girl to whom I have given lessons. She has a voice not unlike Giulia Grisi's when she made her *début*."

"Then it is all very simple," the Commandatore said.

"And we have arrived at the bottom of the mystery," the Prince added.

"Oh dear no, you have not hit the mark at all."

"No, if his love is, as you suppose, an unhappy one," the Princess said.

"Oh, but that does not always prevent . . ."

Loriani interrupted the Prince.

"You are quite wrong, I assure you. Biagio Marini watches over his daughter with the eyes of a lynx. Rinaldo would not have been allowed to come into the house a second time if he had so much as looked at her. I dare say he has never seen the fair Ersilia."

"Oh, questo poi! . . ." the Commandatore exclaimed.

"Poor Rinaldo!" the Princess said. "His sorrow must be a deep one to have thus transformed him; but he ought to have come and confided it to me."

“Well, if his object is solitude, it is scarcely at the Palazzo Mazzolini he was likely to find it.”

Loriani's remark was at that moment justified by an influx of company.

The salon of the Princess Hermione was soon filled with a brilliant and cosmopolite set of visitors, such as no other city can command. Indeed, in those days at Rome foreigners could hardly be called strangers, so great was the number of those who year after year returned there every winter. Intimate ties were thus formed between them and the specially Roman portion of a society which in no way resembled that of places where people meet once, and away, and never perhaps come together again.

New faces, of course, were seen there every season; but by the side of this fluctuating element was always to be found the resident scholars and artists of every nation, who having originally come to Rome to study, fixed their residence there simply because they could no longer bear to live elsewhere. If we add to this the Roman aristocracy—one of the highest in existence—and the

great dignitaries of the Church, who then mixed in society, it can be well imagined that all this gave it a peculiar stamp, and realized the idea of what people agree to call the *grand monde*, more brilliantly and less frivolously than in any other instance.

The Princess Hermione, moreover, added to the attractions of her salon the charm which belongs to a graceful, gracious, intelligent woman, who, without being herself extremely well informed, has gained, by a long intercourse with distinguished and celebrated men, the talent of questioning with tact, and of contributing to the general conversation the light baggage, so to speak, of her somewhat slender acquirements.

During the winter Raynald had spent at Rome before his return to Paris, where he had found Eliane domesticated under his mother's roof, he had been one of the most constant *habitues* of the Palazzo Mezzolini. Many and many a time whilst his day-dreams had been bright and hopeful during that spring, the most enchanting to him of all was the thought of returning again to Rome with the charming wife he hoped to have

made his own. It had been delightful to be there alone ; to be there with her would be rapture! . . . In that case with what joy he would have introduced her to the Princess Hermione. Eliane seemed made for that society, and that society for her.

But it was not thus he was to trace back his steps to the city he loved so well. He had returned to Rome because, after fifteen months of rapid and feverish travelling, he had felt an imperative need of moral and physical repose ; and he had sought it, as does a tired child, in the arms of its mother ! But not to lead the same existence as before. A great change had come over him. He had suffered not only more than his mother had foreseen, but even more than he had himself expected. Up to that time Raynald had never known sorrow or experienced contradiction. He was not one of those who know how to suffer silently, and rise higher by the practice of outward acts inspired by the very anguish which tortures them. No ; he was almost provoked at his own constancy because it made him suffer, and did his best to get over his love for Eliane by every

means short of those which would have made him unworthy of having had her for a friend. The holy influence she had exercised over him was still all-powerful in his soul in spite of time and absence.

More than a year had thus been spent. Raynald wrote often to his mother and to Malseigne: with her he was respectful and reserved, with his friend open and sometimes violent in the expression of his feelings; but the Marquise and Malseigne seldom spoke of him to each other. Although grieved at his long absence, she was obstinately sanguine as to its results. He, on the contrary, discerned clearly the state of Raynald's mind, and was equally anxious about the restless and wayward traveller and the quiet girl at home, who was suffering too, though she never thought of herself, or of occupying others with her sorrow.

Loriani had been, then, on the whole, well informed as to the young foreigner's concerns. Raynald had been six weeks in Rome, and had made his arrival known to no one except a young artist of the French Academy, whose studious habits he was well acquainted with.

His name was Myriel. He was likely to become a great painter, and was something better even than that—an artist in the highest sense of the word. Art was to him a region in which science, history, and poetry were included, and religion predominated. It combined in his estimation all the great and divine objects to which his thoughts and his life were devoted.

Thanks to him, Raynald was placed in temporary possession of an apartment on the Forum, which had been arranged and inhabited by a famous musician, whose simple and exquisite taste was in keeping with his genius. The way to this half-artistic, half-monastic abode was through a cloister surrounded by graceful arcades forming a court, in the midst of which a white marble fountain was for ever throwing up its pure sparkling waters towards the blue vault overhanging that peaceful and picturesque enclosure. This abode was singularly congenial to Raynald's taste at that moment.

It was also Myriel who introduced him to Biagio Marini, who had been his own friend and instructor, and from that day forward

Raynald likewise became the pupil and constant visitor of the learned Professor, whose apartment was in the highest story of an old palace not far from the Ara Cæli. A dark winding staircase led up to his room, but its windows looked on one of those wonderful views which are so unlike anything else on earth, that those who have been long accustomed to gaze upon them are apt to think all other scenery tame and meaningless in comparison.

Raynald went every day to the Professor's study. In the morning, to read with him a canto of the '*Divina Commedia*,' and the accompanying explanations—in the evening, to converse with old Biagio, whose memory was inexhaustible, and his information on all subjects little short of marvellous. But even then he would often revert to his beloved poet, not as a teacher, but an impassioned worshipper, and turn over the pages of the idolized volume, selecting some of the passages least noticed by ordinary readers. He read them aloud to his companion with that beautiful Italian accent peculiar to Rome. The old man's voice used to quiver with emotion ;

his aged brow, worn with age, toil, and thought, brightened up with an almost juvenile ardour, and in his deep-set and faded eyes a ray of enthusiasm flashed like lightning in a dull sky.

CHAPTER XVI.

BIAGIO MARINI had other pupils besides Raynald, and they attended his lecture in the morning ; but after the Ave Maria no one but him was admitted, and evening after evening he spent with his old Professor. The room they sat in was a large one, the walls of which were covered with books. A few high-backed chairs, gilded in bygone days, and a square table covered with papers and pamphlets, comprised almost all the furniture of Biagio's apartment. A lamp hanging from the ceiling lighted the central table, but the rest of the room was in nearly total darkness.

One morning, as Raynald was replacing a book on the shelves, he observed a guitar fastened by a broad blue ribbon to a hook in the wall. He took it down, examined it, and then lightly touched the strings. The old

man, whose head was bent on his writing-desk, gave a start, and exclaimed,

“Caro Rinaldo! how you frightened me!”

He too called the young Frenchman by what he said was his Roman name.

“I beg your pardon. . . I disturbed you from your work; . . . but why did the noise I made frighten you?”

“That is my daughter’s guitar. When I heard the sound of it I felt as if she was there, whilst I know her to be far away. It seemed like second sight, and you know that this is never a good omen.”

He passed his hand over his shrivelled forehead, and remained absorbed a few minutes in what seemed anxious thought.

It was the first time that Raynald heard him mention his daughter. He felt interested and rather curious to know more about her.

“Have you many children, Signor Biagio?” he asked.

“I have had five sons,” the old man answered, sadly. “They are all dead, and their mother soon followed her youngest boy to the grave, or rather to heaven, I should hope.” He lifted up his eyes and added,

“My poor Dianora could not survive that last sorrow, and four years ago left me alone with our Ersilia, who was then fifteen.”

“And does not your daughter live with you?”

“Oh yes; but she is absent now; and when she is at home Ersilia never comes into this room. We spend our evenings in her drawing-room, as I call it. Come this way, and I will show it you. This old palace was once, as you will see, a handsome abode.”

He lighted a candle and led the way through a short gallery to a large drawing-room, where some faded gilding and dilapidated pictures gave indeed an idea of former splendour, but which looked by that feeble light very desolate. The tapestry hangings were torn, the furniture old and out of repair. The only modern article in the room was a pianoforte.

“Your daughter, I see, is fond of music?”

“It is the only thing she cares for!” Biagio said this in a melancholy tone, and they both returned to their occupations in the study.

Old Biagio, seated in a high-backed chair,

wrapped up in his black cloak, with his broad forehead, his bald head, his refined features, his beard, and deep-set eyes, lighted by the single lamp in the room, looked like one of Rembrandt or Titian's pictures. Raynald thought so, and gazed on him with admiration and respectful affection. From his first acquaintance with this old man he had been touched and interested by the sight of a life consecrated to the noblest pursuits, and drawing to a close, almost in poverty,—by the contrast of gifts and talents which ought to have secured to him fortune and fame,—and the obscure fate of his aged friend.

Biagio, on the other hand, had taken a great fancy to a pupil so very superior to those he was in the habit of instructing, and in his daughter's absence he had gladly allowed Raynald to come to him every evening in order to speak Italian, and read with him.

The Professor and the young Marquis soon became very intimate. Though Raynald just then hated society, he was naturally very sociable, and inclined, as we have already said, to think a good deal of himself, and

consequently to speak of his feelings when this could be done without imprudence. At the same time he was proud and sensitive, and would rather have died than run the chance of being answered by a smile or a jest.

But when Biagio, with that penetration which is a peculiarly Italian quality, had guessed—which he did after a very short acquaintance—that a secret sorrow was stimulating his pupil's ardour for study, he managed with tact and simplicity to put to him questions which, without wounding his susceptibility, drew from the young man the history of his grief. It was all told to him except Eliane's name, which Raynald took care not to make known. But he did not deny himself the consolation of bewailing his fate, of declaring himself to be the most unhappy of men, and of interesting his old master so keenly in his sorrows, that their mutual regard and sympathy daily increased beyond what would have seemed possible, considering the difference in their ages and their positions.

What he knew of his friend's attachment and grief made the old Professor less sus-

picious of him than of the other young men who frequented his house, and he did not seem displeased when Raynald one day asked him where his daughter was.

“At Pesaro,” he answered. “She went with her old nurse to stay a little time with one of her mother’s friends. It is rather a dull life for a young girl here at home with an aged man, who works from morning to night, and is not always in good spirits. I try now and then to let her have a little amusement. The summer too was very hot, and she required fresh air, so I sent her away for a few weeks; but she will soon be coming back.”

Whilst Raynald was thinking of some other question to ask, for he wished to prolong the conversation, Biagio moved in his chair, came nearer to the table, leant his head on one of his hands, and with the other absently drew figures with his pencil on a bit of paper. Then, as if speaking to himself, he said,

“Girls are sweet and pretty. We get wonderfully fond of them, but they are not as clever as boys.”

Raynald could hardly keep his countenance,

but Biagio looked so serious that he did not venture to laugh.

“That is a point, my dear Professor, on which opinions may differ.”

“Well, I suppose girls are not all alike; there may be some amongst them who have more capabilities than others for science and study, and that real, earnest, indefatigable application, without which nothing can be achieved.”

“But really,” Raynald rejoined, “that is a sort of thing we do not expect from them, I think.”

“Why not? They are intelligent enough, they have good memories, and often excellent taste. My poor Ersilia possesses all these gifts, and many others also. But what she wants is the power of making use of them, the will to work. I am sorry to say it, I am ashamed to own it, but Ersilia, my daughter Ersilia, is . . . well, I must out with it . . . I am afraid she is lazy! . . .”

It was only the real concern which the old man seemed to feel that checked Raynald's strong inclination to smile. But Biagio went on to say, in a grave and touching

manner, which soon put a stop to any idea of merriment,

“I had once hoped to train her so that she might one day be able to teach others. I wanted her to adopt a means of livelihood useful and sure, which would save her from destitution, for with all my efforts I cannot secure her against it. The comparative comfort she now enjoys depends on my ceaseless labour; but when I am gone . . .”

The old man's voice failed him, but a tear ran down his cheek and fell on his white beard.

Raynald, much affected by his distress, did not speak. Biagio overcame his emotion, and said,

“The worst of it is, Rinaldo, that there is one art in which, without hardly taking any pains, she excels. According to the great Maestro Vincenzo Loriani, she is gifted with what the French call ‘une voix d’or,’ one of those voices not often to be met with even in our own Italy, and which enables the person who possesses it to make a fortune, which the long labours of my life could not obtain for her.”

"And why do you think that so sad?" asked Raynald.

"Why I think it sad?" Biagio exclaimed. "If you cannot guess why I hate the very thought of it, then I will tell you. First, you must know that Ersilia's mother, my dear Dianora, had that same beautiful voice, and when I saw her for the first time she was singing at La Scala in Milan, and all Italy was at her feet. Without regret she abandoned the stage, all her successes and triumphs, to share my obscure lot. She was an honest woman, and a good Christian, and then, Rinaldo, she loved me. . . ."

"O Giovantu! Primavera della vita."

Blessed springtide of life, the morning of which brightens, even to the very end, the evening of our days. In the faltering voice of the aged man its echoes were still audible, and the young man's heart thrilled as those accents reached his ears. He silently pressed Biagio's hand, who went on to say,

"God gave us twenty years of happiness, during which I worked with a light heart, and did not know what it was to be tired.

Dianora always helped and encouraged me, she was so brave, so good, so pious! The children were growing up, and we were very happy. But afterwards dark clouds gathered over our heads, the stars in our sky disappeared. As I told you, all our boys died, and when his mother closed little Tonnino's eyes, then her heart broke. She would have wished to live for Ersilia's sake and mine. She was so sorry for me, and tried to get well. But it would not do! That last blow had killed her; she knew that she was going to die. When it came to the last she called me, and in presence of the priest who had given her the last sacraments, she asked me to make her a solemn promise, never, as long as I lived, to allow our daughter to follow what had been her line in early youth. I did not hesitate to give this promise; we were quite agreed on this as on every other point. Dianora had always kept virtuous and preserved her character, but she had been exposed to trials and temptations from which she desired to save her child. I felt as she did, and clasped her hand in mine; and I declare to you, Rinaldo, that rather than see

Ersilia singing in public, or acting on a stage, I would,—yes, God is my witness,—I would rather see her die before my eyes, as I saw her brothers die.”

He pressed his hand on his heart as if a sudden pain had stopped his breath. After a short struggle he recovered it.

“I have had for a long time something the matter with my heart, or my chest, which I know is incurable, and sometimes I think it increases. At any rate, as my strength diminishes it takes a greater hold on me, and then I feel anxious, not about myself, but . . .”

He stopped short, and evidently was too exhausted for further conversation.

It was also later than usual, and Raynald, after making sure that the Professor had recovered from the spasm which his over-excited feelings had brought on, took leave of him with a still greater amount of respect and interest, and some curiosity to know whether the object of his intense solicitude reciprocated her father's affection.

On the following evening he came at the usual hour to Biagio's room, wishing to renew

the subject of their last conversation, but he found him deeply occupied with researches he had to make for an author much less learned than himself, who remunerated him in a very moderate manner for his valuable assistance. He handed a page of manuscript to Raynald and asked him to copy it.

The silence which ensued was suddenly broken by a loud, unusual noise: first the sound of heavy footsteps ascending the stairs was heard, and then that of a fall, followed by a volley of oaths. The bell was rung with violence; the Professor and his pupil rose, and the latter opened the door. By the light of a lamp burning before an ancient Madonna of Lucca di Robia's, he saw a tall, fat man with a red face and stumbling gait.

"The devil take your stairs, Biagio," the visitor exclaimed. "A hundred and fifty steps to climb up are rather too much of a good thing, and I did not bargain for a fall. . . . You might at least hang a lanthorn on the wall."

Biagio, when he saw who was his visitor, sat down again. The latter did not at first perceive Raynald. He thought old Assunta

had, as usual, let him in, and walked into the room grumbling and complaining.

"I hope you did not hurt yourself, Taddeo?"

"Not much; but no thanks to you, Signor Biagio. You take precious little care of your friends' arms and legs."

So saying, the new-comer threw himself into an old leather arm-chair near the book-case.

"I have not many visitors in the evening, and as to you, I thought you were at Naples."

"I came back yesterday. My journey has been successful, the performance magnificent. Where is Ersilia?"

Before the Professor had time to answer his brother, for such he was, had started up in astonishment.

Raynald, who had stopped a moment to trim the flickering lamp in the antechamber, had re-entered the room.

"Diavolo! you did not tell me you had company," the Impressario said in a low voice, "and fashionable company too." Turning towards Raynald, whose height and aris-

ocratic appearance struck him at once, he made a low bow, then whispered to Biagio—

“ Chi è costui ? ”

The Professor looked annoyed, but answered in a quiet manner—

“ The Signor Marchese is one of my pupils ; ” and with an effort said to Raynald, “ Will you allow me to introduce to you my brother Taddeo Marini, the Impressario of the La Pallade Theatre ? ”

Raynald, rather surprised, looked up for an instant and bowed. He had taken an instantaneous dislike to the Professor's brother. The gold chain on his waistcoat and rings on his red fingers added to the vulgarity of his appearance and coarse features.

“ Can it be possible, ” he said to himself, “ that such a brute can be the brother of a man like Biagio Marini ? ”

“ Il Marchese ! ” ejaculated the Impressario, after a hasty scrutiny of the young man, whose face he could now plainly see as he sat reading under the lamp. “ Cospetto ! a famous pupil indeed ! and a friend of the arts as well as of letters, for, if I mistake not, the Signor Marchese di Liminge used to honour our

theatre almost every night with his presence two years ago. As far as I remember, he always occupied the same place in one of the stage boxes."

Nothing could have been more disagreeable to Raynald than to be recognized by this individual. He raised his head for an instant and said,

"I did not recognize you, Signor Impresario; but I remember that I did often go to your theatre, and occupied the place you mention."

Then resuming his book, he plainly showed that he did not intend to join in the conversation.

The Impresario, who was quick enough to see that his room would be more acceptable than his company, resolved to shorten his visit, but not before he had done his business. Without sitting down, he said to his brother,

"I only came in for a minute. I want to know, is Ersilia at home?"

"No," Biagio answered shortly.

"Will she soon return?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I expect her any day."

"She must be bored to death at Pesaro."

"No, she is very happy there ; she wanted change of air."

"What she wants is amusement, and I came on purpose to remind you of your promise."

"Very well, Taddeo. We shall see about it."

"I am bent upon it, and my wife also. What the devil ! Is not Clorinda her aunt ? Has not she as good a right to take her to the opera at Rome as Donna Angelina to take her to see Norma at Pesaro ?"

"How do you know that she did so ?" the Professor quickly asked.

"The prima donna, who has just returned, tells me that she saw Ersilia in a box, and asked who she was, because she thought her handsome, and that she was clapping her hands with all her might. Well, then, it is a settled thing, I suppose."

"I have already told you that I will think about it."

"Well, I shall come and remind you of your promise, Signor Marchese, lo reverisco umilissimamente."

The Impressario made a low bow and left the room, accompanied by Biagio, who took the lamp from the Madonna's altar to light him down-stairs. As they were descending the steps Taddeo said,

"Have you thought of what I spoke to you about a month ago?"

A look of pain was in Biagio's face as he answered,

"There is nothing to think about when one has made up his mind."

"You must be mad."

"Be it so."

"Mad, and wrong-headed."

"God will be my judge."

"You will change your mind when you come to consider of it."

"Never, as long as I live."

Taddeo held out his hand to him and said,

"I beg your pardon, Biagio; you know that it is for your own sake and Ersilia's that I press it, but I will say no more at present. Good night."

Then turning back again, he added,

"I have business at Bologna; I am going there for a few days, but when I come back

I shall hold you to your promise. Don't forget it."

Biagio made no answer. He closed the door and resumed his seat at the table, but when he took up his pen, his hand was trembling so much that he could hardly write.

Raynald looked at him anxiously. He was afraid that he was about to be affected as he had been the night before, for a deadly paleness had succeeded the flush caused by his brother's presence and conversation. He recovered himself, however, more easily than on the last occasion, but did not feel equal to further work that evening.

Raynald left him very early, still more interested than the day before in the domestic history of his old friend, and less occupied with his own grief than he had been since the day of the storm at Erlon.

